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CONFLICT ZONE
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ALONE IN THE DARK
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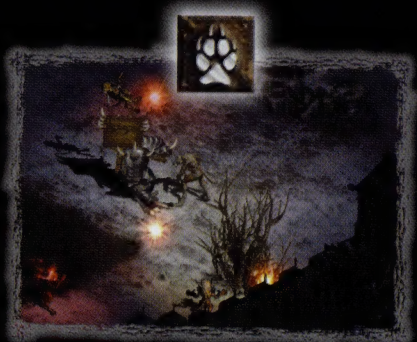**Werebear:** Transform into a hulking beast of the wilds

**Molten Boulder:** Unleash a smoldering mass of brimstone to crush your opponent

**Werewolf:** Assume the shape of nature's feral hunter

**Druid:** A solitary shaman of the northern wilds, this brooding mystic is the ruler of the forest. Having command over the elements as well as the power to transform himself into vicious creatures, the Druid is the embodiment of Nature's fury.

# DIABLO II
## EXPANSION SET
### LORD OF DESTRUCTION

# STATE OF THE ART

A lot of navel gazing occurs after every E3. Once the doors close on the last day, conversing journalists inevitably find themselves debating the state of the industry. This year was no exception. So what did this year's E3 tell us about the future of games?

The major trend is consolidation. In terms of the number of companies in attendance and the number of games on display, the show was marginally smaller than last year. Some publishers did manage to increase their presence - Ubisoft, in particular, thanks to its recent purchasing frenzy - yet the mood at most stands was somewhat muted.

Interplay was showing a mere five PC titles - two of which were expansion packs. Infogrames could muster nothing of note on the show floor, leaving its most notable PC efforts behind closed doors. Eidos had but one genuinely new PC game on display - Praetorians, from Commandos maker Pyro Studios. Even the mighty Microsoft had only a handful of PC titles, and we had seen them all before save for Age of Mythology (and many of us felt we'd seen that before, too).

The cyclical nature of the games industry is partly responsible. Publishers are rushing to join the PS2, Xbox and Gamecube bandwagons, and in the meantime the PC is missing out. The problem for publishers (but not for gamers) is that although PC games sales steadily increase each year, the AAA titles still can't match the sales of console hits. The PC market is too fragmented, a collection of niche markets rather than one homogenous whole.

In response, the attitude of publishers is one of quality over quantity. In fact, across all publishers, the level of quality seemed higher than in previous years. Most games appeared more polished and playable. Yet while this is undoubtedly a good thing, there is at least one down side: risk taking and innovation will become ever more rare commodities.

E3 showed just how entrenched the established genres have become. Everyone had their firstperson shooters (with added sniper rifle!), everyone had their realtime strategy game, everyone had their roleplaying game. Aside from Republic there was hardly a game prepared to step outside the traditional genre boundaries.

So, to end this editorial, a question for you. What would you prefer from the future of games: evolution or revolution?

david@next.com.au

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# PC PowerPlay

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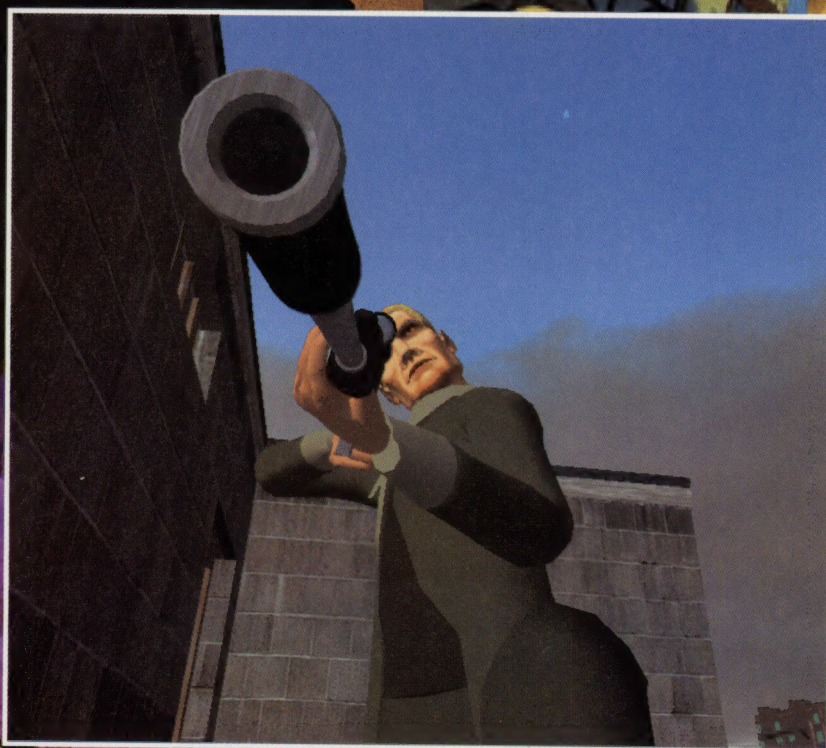
## 30 State of Play
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# Aliens Vs Predator 2

## GAME OVER, MAN! GAME OVER!

Classic environments from a classic film make for a potentially classic game



At last we get to use Power Loaders... sweet
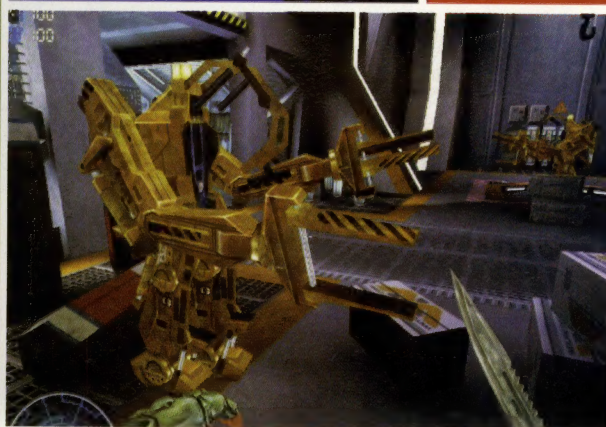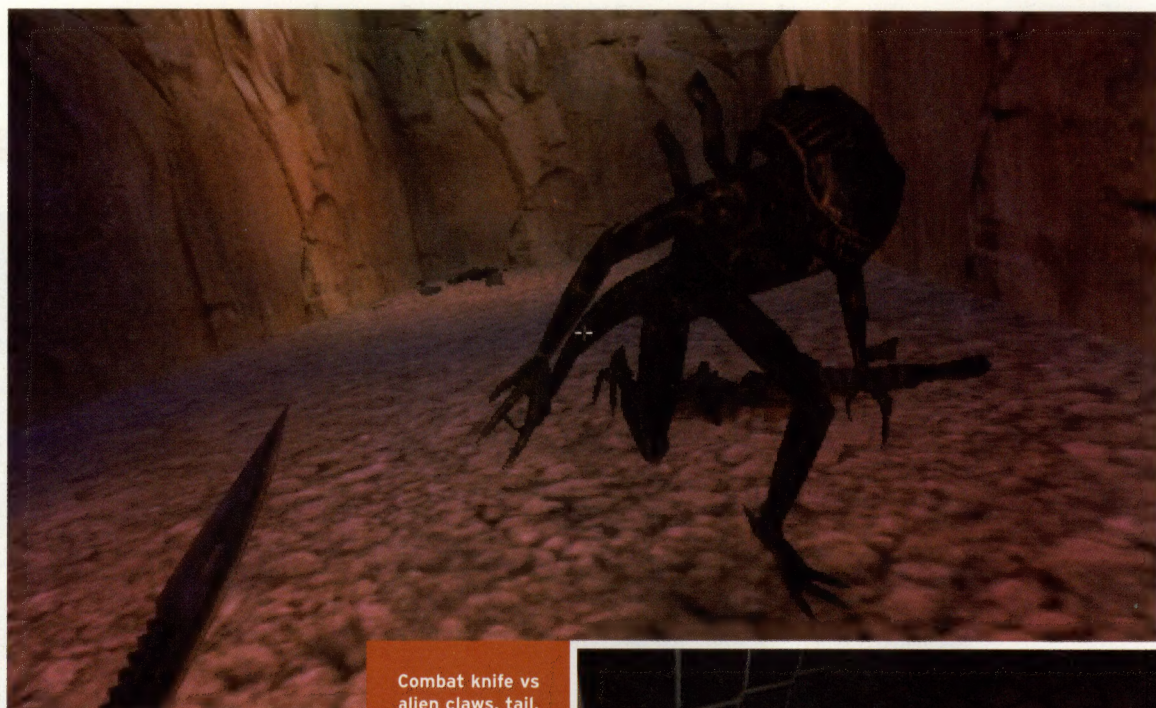
Combat knife vs alien claws, tail, bitey tongue, acid blood, spiked kick...
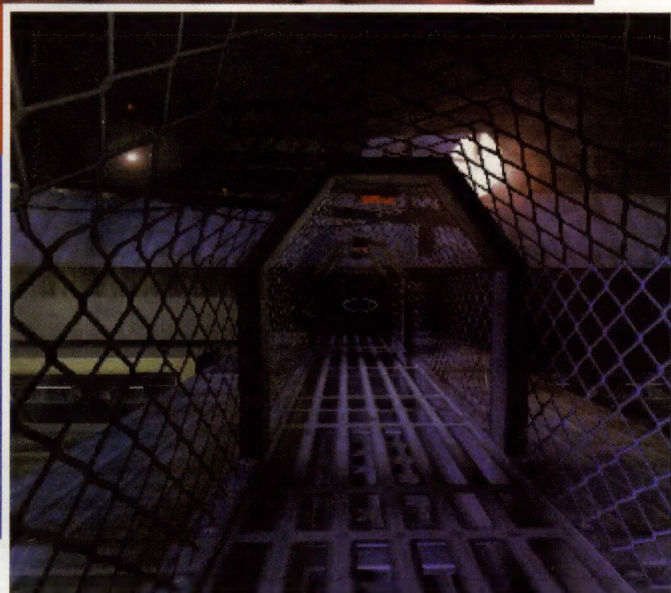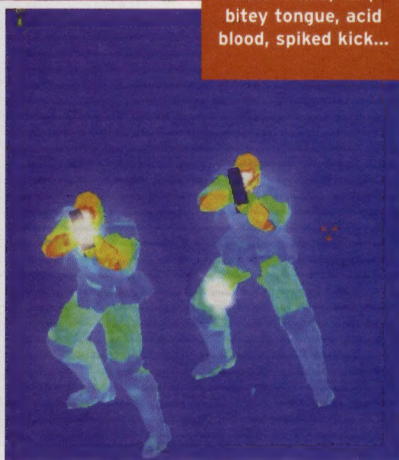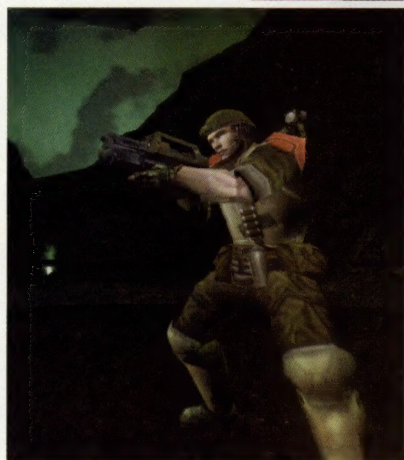
A particular staff writer I know owns a copy of the script to the never-filmed Aliens vs. Predator feature film. The script is dusty now and rarely opened but it recalls a time when the fusing of two great sci-fi franchises into one terrible hybrid was a highly anticipated possibility. In the crushing aftermath of that film's demise, this writer gathered himself together and tried to carry on – somehow. In all likelihood AvP, the happiest example of film/game symbiosis in history, saved that young man's life. It could have been you...

Those times are gone. Sci-fi fans' dreams were granted in the original game and the future looked dark... terribly dark. Praised as one of the few pants-wetting action games around, the original was nonetheless, somewhat limited. The monotone darkness and endless corridors are gone in AvP 2. The LithTech engine is one of the benefits that Monolith brings (replacing Rebellion, developers of the original). Thanks to LithTech, expect to find yourself running screaming through large open-spaced outdoor areas.

This instalment of AvP takes place on a deserted outpost planet where some cocky scientists unleash the Alien plague on themselves. Cue the marines to come in and clean up. Cue the Predators to come in and make a mess of everyone. In AvP 2, you get two styles of human: the mercenary and the colonial marine, both with unique capabilities and weaponry. Add to that the inclusion of the chest burster and face hugger aliens and you're talking big time special variety.

Effort has been made to balance up the three races, particularly to give the marine a little more growl. A noted inclusion is the sniper rifle and spider mines that follow enemies in proximity. Weapons that can lessen the strength of the Predator, namely its invisibility, are also included. The Predator is likely to receive the net gun. The Alien will not feature an acid spit, since close range is its forte. The arsenal from the first title will return for the most part, with a few minor changes including those already mentioned. Opening up the game so that players can make use of power tools and Power Loaders (finally...), is a big plus.

NPC AI will receive a big improvement – there are even comparisons to Half-Life floating about. The game will feature seven missions for each race as a prelude to multiplayer. There's a staff writer out there who is licking his chops as we wait.

**John Dewhurst**

## WHY AVP 2 DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

- ■ Baddest three race combo in the history of history itself!
- ■ Improved balance between each of the races
- ■ Improved level design; you really feel the slime!
- ■ Scratching sounds around the corner...

# Wardog

## SOMEBODY SET UP HIS HEAD THE BOMB
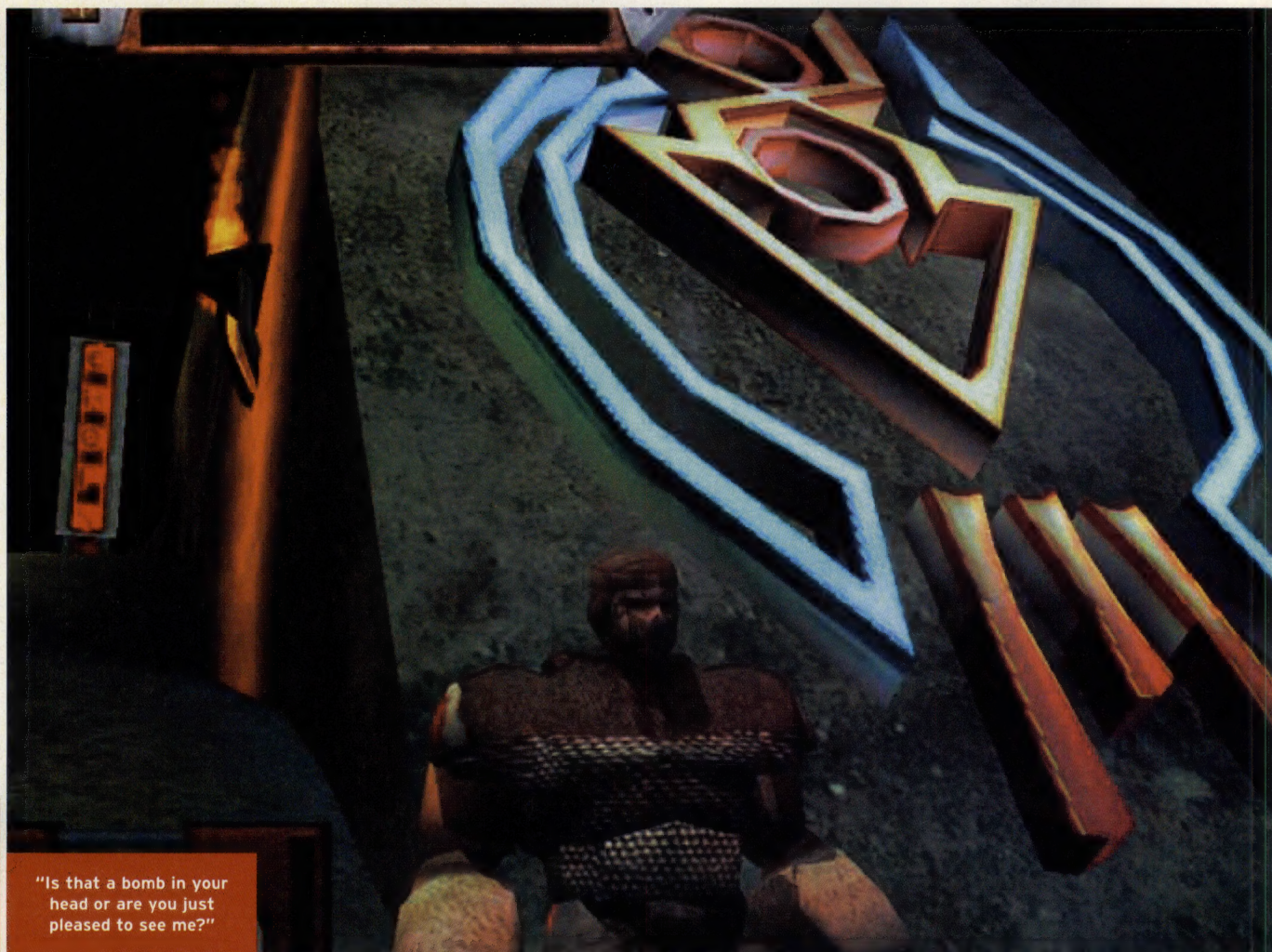
"Is that a bomb in your head or are you just pleased to see me?"





Surgical instruments + droid = world of pain
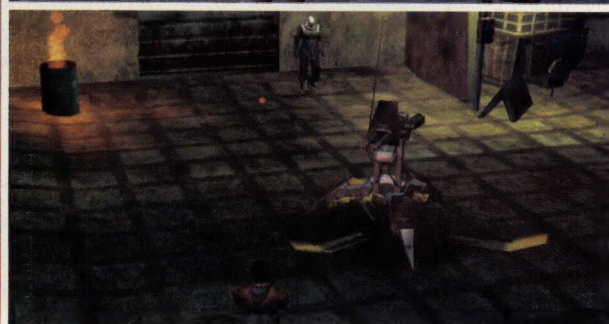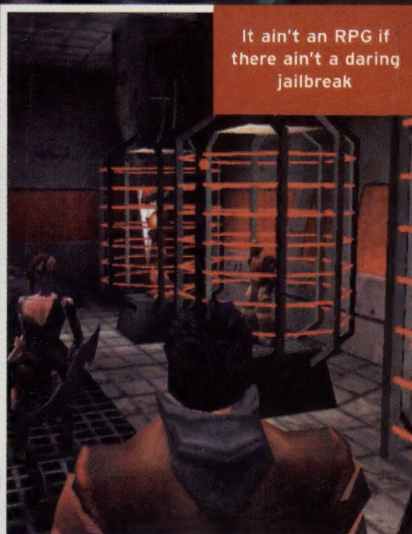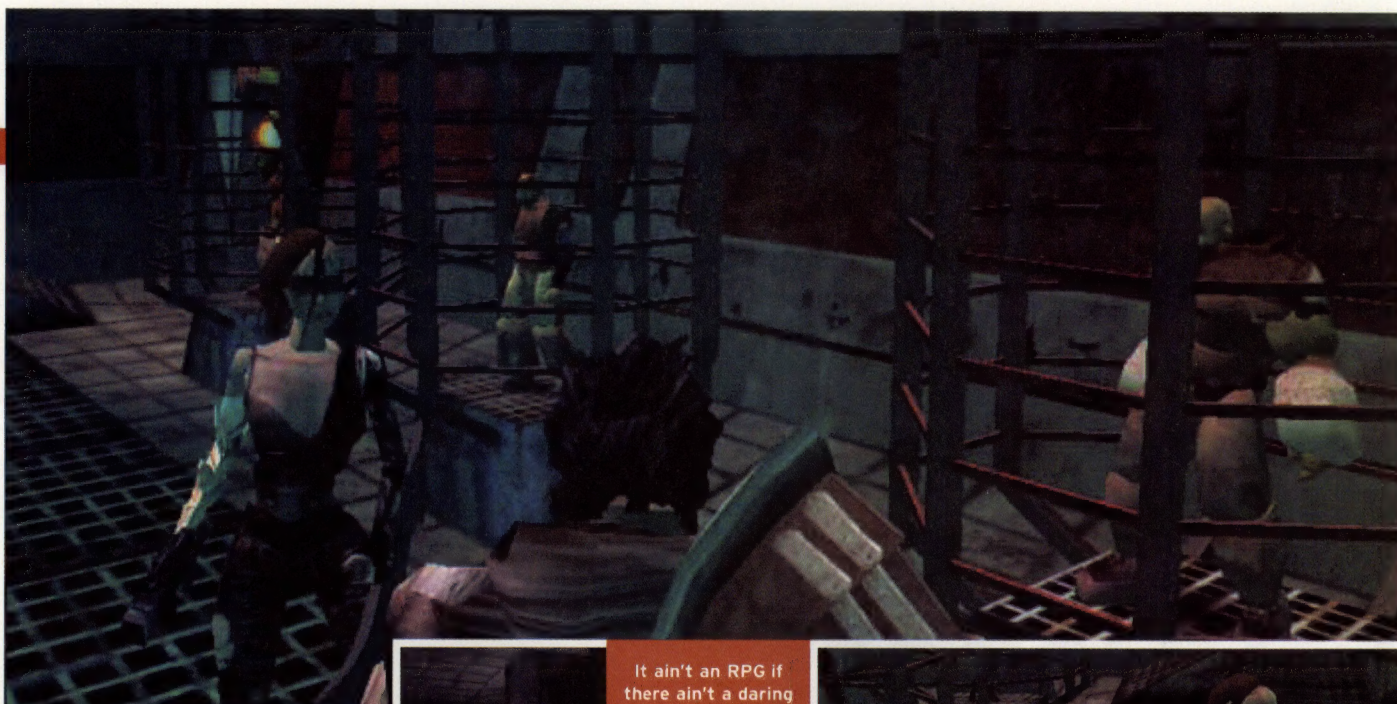
It ain't an RPG if there ain't a daring jailbreak
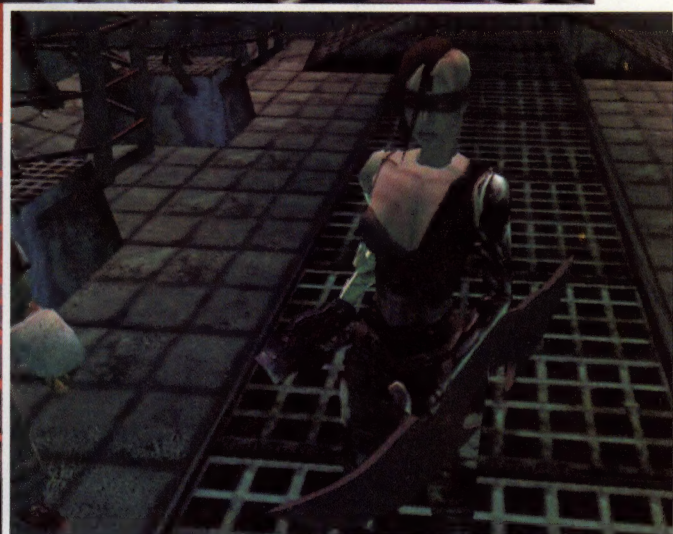




Since a certain Black Isle title, which receives entirely too much endorsement within these pages, it seems successive RPGs need only one storyline: misfit amnesiac scours the land for clues to his past, meets some lovely people, laughter, tears and jeers, all with a liberal philosophical garnish. Planescape: Torment is the prime example. Similar titles like Baldur's Gate 2 and TORN might also cause role players to raise a sceptical eyebrow at yet another title of this kind.

Wardog comes from British developers Rebellion, who are responsible for Gunlok and Alien vs Predator, amongst others. Rest assured, the quality of the story will match that of the developer, since the services of zwriters from the 2000AD comics have been enlisted. Not only does the game boast an involved, smart combat system, but also a strong (if not inspired) narrative to match.

Wardog is Rebellion's own title and came about as a result of their peculiar need to maintain production, even when titles aren't brought to them from other sources. So the story is their own: original and characters unknown. Rebellion will use their 2000AD connections to introduce the Wardog story in Judge Dredd magazine in the months prior to the release of the game.

A bomb in the head. This is what sets Wardog apart from his contemporaries. He knows not who he is but he does know that the bomb in his head is live and could go off at the next inopportune moment (*And when would having a bomb go off in your head be opportune? - Ed*). The result is a unique spin on game mechanics. Some missions will feature a time limit. Should Wardog fail his assignment, the head on his shoulders will blow skywards. This injection of urgency should be a nice change of pace in what is a non-linear RPG in the classic mould.

Combat will be a blend of real-time & turn-based elements and individual body parts can be targeted in battle. This being the desolate future where machines inhabit flesh and vice versa, the chance to profit from another's death is a real possibility. Silicon from a robotic skull is far more valuable than an arm, so careful choices in battle must be made to ensure survival – and profit.

The large, open areas seen in these Wardog screens are a promise of what's to come and if the future-noir style is anything to go by, expect a dark, engrossing RPG. Wardog sits permanently on the horizon as Rebellion is yet to find a publisher. Updates in PC Powerplay in the coming months.

**John Dewhurst**

## WHY WARDOG DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...
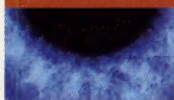
| ■ Stunning 3D role playing | ■ Fusion of real time and turned based combat | ■ Fresh blend of RPG and furious action | ■ This guy has an actual bomb inside his actual head |

# Spotlight

# E3 Report

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SHOW FLOOR



On May 17-19, the Los Angeles Convention Centre hosted the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo, the most important games event of the year. In attendance were game publishers and developers from as far afield as Norway, South Africa, Russia, Korea and of course Australia. Flying the flag for the local specialist press was PC PowerPlay.

Like every E3 there was considerable emphasis placed on impressive technological advancement (this time thanks to the wonders of nVidia's Geforce 3) but distressingly scant evidence of genuine progression in terms of game design. The dominant theme was undoubtedly the sniper rifle.

Having found the power to depict large outdoor environments with ease, it appears most developers are still getting to grips with creating levels that aren't encased within four walls and have limited fields of vision. The sniper rifle is the only gameplay mechanic they've perfected at this stage. Here's hoping someone retrieves another tool from their design inventory soon. While the focus was understandably on a certain Japanese console making its first public appearance, the PC could still boast many of the most innovative and exciting titles in development. That is, once the inevitable sea of clones and underachievement had been tactfully negotiated.

### Eye-popping

Our first destination once the doors had opened on the Thursday morning was the Microsoft stand. Past the often mediocre selection of firstparty Xbox titles, Microsoft's smaller PC range promised a more even

The show is clearly a geek's wet dream

spread of quality, if not quantity. Having come a long way in every respect (especially its now eye-popping graphics capability) since Gamestock in March, Sigma: The Adventures of Rex Chance was the undoubted highlight. It was good to see Age of Mythology up and running after our preview last issue, and even better to rediscover Freelancer again after the departure of Chris Roberts and its no-show at Gamestock.

Next we marched to the Vivendi Universal (formerly Havas Interactive) stand, where Blizzard and Sierra were sheltered under their French owner's newly christened umbrella. Warcraft 3 had the largest presence and predictably drew the most onlookers, but its simplistic RTS stylings were outshone by the mighty Empire Earth. On this form, Rick Goodman, the Lead Designer of Age of Empires, seems on the verge of creating one of the all-time great games. Recently completed but still awaiting language translations, Arcanum was probably the best RPG on display. Its powerful editing suite surpasses even that of Neverwinter Nights.

### Promise and ambition

Outside in the parking lot across the road - or 'Promised Lot' as Gathering of Developers called its garish presence - it was hard to discern what the main attraction was meant to be: the games or the entourage of booth babes and sideshow freaks. Either way, Max

Payne was stunning, relegating even Duke Nukem Forever (shown in trailer form only) to mere curiosity.

The unveiling of Rainbow Six follow-up Ghost Recon stole the limelight at the Ubisoft stand. Its main claim to fame was its effective demonstration of the power of the sniper rifle - what else is there to add? Planetside dispelled those unkind Halo comparisons (it's more like Tribes in a persistent state world, to be honest), while Lock On looked the business for action-craving flight sim fans.

Infogrames disappointed on the show floor, but more than compensated with private viewings of Unreal 2, Civilization 3 and Master of Orion 3 behind closed doors. Each was an impressive enhancement of an established formula, with MOO3 undergoing the greatest overhaul. Eidos was similarly disappointing, if only because it had nothing new to show. Hidden away in a private booth, however, was the clear highlight of the whole three days: Elixir Studios' Republic. Breathtakingly original and staggeringly ambitious, Republic is nevertheless on track to live up to its subtitle - The Revolution. The game of E3, bar none.

### Out in force

The Interplay trio of Neverwinter Nights, Torn and Galleon oozed quality. The latter will lead on Xbox later in the year, but has been developed on PC since its conception so we'll see it shortly afterwards. Meanwhile,

Electronic Arts had its own terrific threesome in Medal of Honor, Freedom Force and Simsville, all in stark contrast to the surrounding barrage of yawn-inducing EA Sports updates.

One of the biggest surprises of the show was the return to form of LucasArts, who was revealing the next four Star Wars titles. However, Battleground is the only one produced by LucasArts in-house, so nearly all the credit must be instead given to Bioware (Knights of the Old Republic), Verant (Galaxies) and Raven (Jedi Outcast). The brief trek across to the Activision booth was rewarded with our first glimpse of Armada 2 and an eager helping of Bridge Commander. It would seem that the days of second-rate Star Trek games is fading fast. Elbowing our way past countless geeks desperate to have their photo taken with yet more booth babes (this time in uniform), we also had a quick play with Return to Castle Wolfenstein. Like Duke Forever, this remake remains true to the original's spirit by promising a good time rather than anything groundbreaking.

### Replicants

Elsewhere, THQ showed off Red Faction (thankfully the PC version is a marked improvement over the PS2), the classy Yager and another revamp of Tetris, this time bearing a Worlds suffix. Crave had the elegant realtime strategy of Battle Realms complementing the inventive team-based action of Global Ops. Perhaps the most eye-catching stand belonged to small-time developer Mythic Entertainment, who had constructed a huge replica medieval castle to promote its online RPG, Dark Age of Camelot. Mythic's effort aside, E3 2001 was a more subdued affair overall than previous years. The belt-tightening of last year seems to have been done in most of the right places - cutting back on lavish indulgence and gratuitous schmoozing, while still allowing a good number of excellent developers the creative freedom required. Indeed, there's a fantastic year ahead for gamers of all persuasions. But especially if you like sniper rifles.
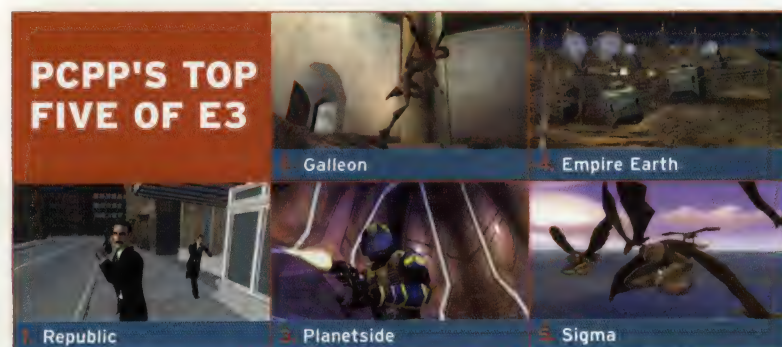


**PCPP'S TOP FIVE OF E3**

Galleon

Empire Earth

Republic

Planetside

Sigma

# Condition Zero Furore
## WAR OF WORDS BETWEEN ROGUE AND VALVE

A battle of words has erupted over Condition Zero, the recently announced singleplayer missions for Counter Strike. Rogue Entertainment, enlisted by Valve to develop Condition Zero, has been dumped from the project. This marks another blow in the continuing woes of Rogue.

Rogue developed Alice for EA and was in the midst of producing a PS2 version earlier this year. EA ceased funding Rogue's work for the PS2 port, speculation suggests due to the massive losses EA incurred on the embattled console. Rogue scrambled to find work, eventually coming to an agreement with Valve for Condition Zero. Valve has moved the project in-house and Rogue are on the verge of collapse.

Boby Pavlock of Rogue responded angrily to the account Valve's Gabe Newell gave of the events. According to Newell, Rogue approached Valve for a project and Valve generously obliged.

Their position to develop the project was "in limbo" after Jim Molinets left Rogue to take a position with Sony, a supposed violation of their agreement. The Valve version is that Condition Zero was moved in-house after Rogue folded.

Bobby Pavlock of Rogue responded with particular venom towards EA, for the treatment over Alice. According to Pavlock, EA cut funding three days before payday and stated "it's not our problem".

Pavlock went on to slam Valve by stating that "Valve called them" to do Condition Zero and then dumped them prematurely over the departure of Molinets. Also Pavlock states the project would always be secure, regardless of Molinets. Rogue hasn't folded as yet, despite the fact that a number of employees have moved elsewhere due to the events of the past months. Condition Zero is currently in development at Valve.
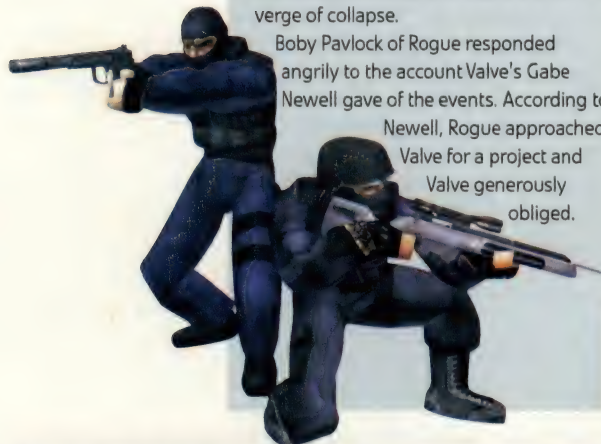
# Extra
### ADD-ONS EXPANSIONS UPDATES

The stand-alone expansion pack for Starfleet Command 2, Orion Pirates is almost upon us. This episode of the Star Trek's space command strategy Series will focus on 8 new pirate cartels, each with access to new feet and arsenal, and one with monster units. Complete with new ship models, new weapons and improved special effects, no Star Trek fan's game library is complete without Orion Pirates. Slated for 3rd quarter release, it should be available right now.

Isometric RTS, Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns, will receive an expansion pack in the form of Kohan: Ahriman's Gift. Release date is scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2001.

While Digitalo's add-on to Unreal Tournament, announced at last year's E3, has been cancelled, the developer has been working on Devastation, a near complete team-based strategy FPS game "running on next generation Unreal Engine technology". Local release is likely in the 4th quarter of 2001.

# Garriott's new Destination
## NEW ON-LINE GAME DEVELOPMENT STUDIO

Richard Garriott announced Destination Games, his new development studio at E3 2001. In a parting dig at his former publishers, Garriott decided to announce his new studio plans in front of the EA booth at E3. The creator of the classic Ultima series will team with his brother Robert, Ultima Online co-creator Starr Long and Jake Song, the creator of Lineage, to concentrate on producing online games for North America and Asia. Increasing support and profile of Lineage in North America is also a priority. Destination is a part of NCSoft, the Korean games company that operates Lineage: The Blood Pledge, the largest online game in the world, with a greater subscription base than the top three US titles combined (Everquest, Ultima Online and Asheron's Call), with two million active accounts in Korea alone. According to Lord British himself: "This is a match made in heaven. We're excited to leverage NCsoft and Jake's experience to help us launch our games in Asia."

# Confidential

## CROSS YOUR HEART AND HOPE TO DIE...

E3 gossip had it that Thief 3 and Deus Ex 2 would appear on Xbox before PC. Warren Spector responded: "It never ceases to amaze me how quickly rumours spread in this business and how willing people are to accept rumour as fact... rumours circulating on the net that Deus Ex 2 and Thief 3 will ship on console first, with PC 'ports' coming later [are] simply not true... we have no plans to release a console version of DX2 or T3 before a PC version or to compromise one version to accommodate the needs of any other." Official announcements for these titles are still some way in the future.

Blizzard has raised eyebrows with a shameless teaser of their latest game, to be announced at European Computer Trade Show in September. Apparently, it is NOT Starcraft 2 and public speculation isn't even close to the truth. Expect big things come September.

# MASSIVELY Multiplayer Babel Fish

## SONY ONLINE SET TO LOCALISE MMO GAMES

Sony Online Entertainment has announced plans to offer language translation for massively multiplayer online games such as Everquest. Human and automated translation agents will be used to allow players from around the globe to interact textually in these games as well as English spea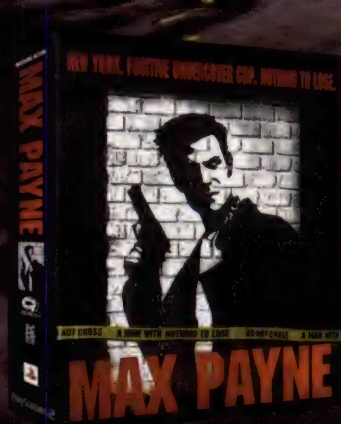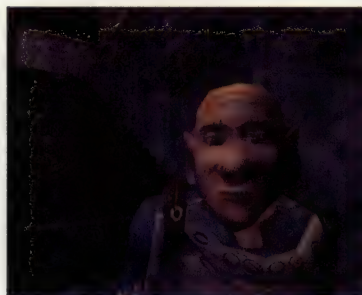kers are able to. Initially, languages to be localised will be German, Japanese, French and Korean. "The vision of a global gaming community has always been the core of our business model," said Kelly Flock, president of Sony Online Entertainment.

"The localization allows us to surpass language barriers and give gamers worldwide the best online gaming experience.

The first title to be localised in this way will be EverQuest: The Shadows of Luclin the third expansion pack in the phenomenally successfully MMORPG series. Other online titles to follow in the future are Star Wars Galaxies and Planetside, the firstperson action game set in a persistent world.

# PUSH TO INFORM PARENTS

## ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY UNITES TO PROMOTE CLASSIFICATION

The Australian Visual Software Distributors Association (AVSDA) has launched a nationwide public awareness campaign to promote understanding of the classification of games, videos and DVD entertainment. The campaign aims to educate Australian parents and guardians in choosing the right product for their children. Titled "Make the Right Choice", the campaign begins this month.

The campaign will feature in retail and rental outlets to target an apparent lack of regulation that allows children to view adult material. The campaign will include information packs for staff and clear publicity information for parents, in an effort to illuminate community understanding of today's entertainment products. The video trailer outlining the classification ratings will run on the header of every rental video across the country. Ros Wilson, Chair of AVSDA, comments: "We are proud to be an industry which brings fun and entertainment to people of all ages and we dedicate 100 per cent commitment to ensuring that the consumers of our products are aware of what they are purchasing. We are especially aware of our responsibility to our younger audience."

Violent suburban incidents around the world combined with strong views of parents groups have kept this issue near the headlines for a decade. The recent blunder of NSW State education minister, John Aquilina, in naming a "potential" killer in a NSW school is another example.

Des Clark, Director of the OFLC states: "I am delighted that the AVSDA campaign will make it easier for retailers of interactive games, videos and DVDs across Australia to comply with requirements to display approved notices of the classification ratings".

The AVSDA, which comprises the biggest distributors of video and games in Australia, is regulated by the Office of Film & Literature Classification. The OFLC is the independent government body that operates the national classification scheme.

Making the right choice isn't a game.

Use the ratings advice on each game to make the right choice for your family.

| G | G8+ | M15+ | MA15+ |
| GENERAL (ALL AGES) | GENERAL | MATURE | MA RESTRICTED |
| RECOMMENDED FOR ALL AGES | RECOMMENDED FOR PERSONS 8 YEARS AND OVER | RECOMMENDED FOR PERSONS 15 YEARS AND OVER | RESTRICTED FOR SALE AND PLAY TO PERSONS 15 YEARS AND OVER UNLESS ACCOMPANIED BY A PARENT OR GUARDIAN. |

# Star Wars returns to PC

## LUCASARTS UNVEILS THEIR NEWEST GAMES AT E3
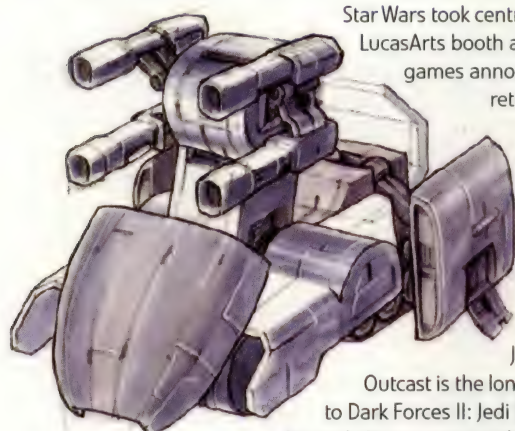
Star Wars took centre stage at the LucasArts booth at E3 2001. The games announced mark a return to some serious material after a slew of "cash-in" Episode One titles for PC, Force Commander and Battle for Naboo. Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast is the long-awaited sequel to Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight.

Raven Software, responsible for such PC FPS titles as Elite Force and Soldier of Fortune, is developing Jedi Outcast. Jedi Outcast will play in a singleplayer campaign, deathmatch and light sabre deathmatch. Force powers will feature prominently in the game with varied effects and environmental interaction.

The other LucasArts PC titles that appeared at E3 were also Star Wars based. Battlegrounds is an RTS game featuring six races (see screenshots on page 18), pivotal battles from the feature films and 200 units per side. Knights of the Old Republic is a traditional RPG being developed by leaders in the genre, Bioware, and will boast an in-depth story, six playable classes, three races, over 100 skills and 50 feats.

Another title that caused a big stir was Star Wars: Galaxies, a massively multiplayer online RPG (read more in our E3 feature from p32).

Following the announcement some time ago that Obi Wan would only appear on Xbox and not on PC, much of the Star Wars action has taken place on consoles. E3 2001 sees a return to a PC commitment by LucasArts, a company with an enviable history in games annals. While release of Battlegrounds is expected at Christmas 2001, we won't see Galaxies, Knights of the Old Republic or Jedi Outcast until next year at the earliest.
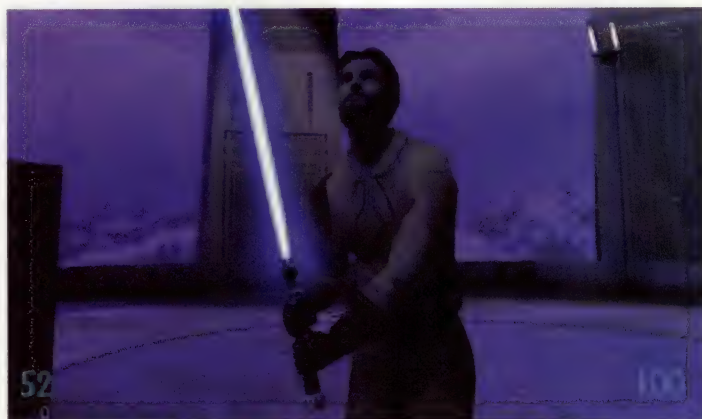
# Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon

Ubi Soft Entertainment has acquired the license from Sony Pictures to develop and publish Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon games worldwide. The game will look to replicate the fast-paced, acrobatic combat and flight sequences. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon will debut on PC and current or next generation consoles on the market.

Yves Guillemot, President & CEO of Ubi Soft stated "With this amazingly successful film, we have the ability to tell stories that are not only technically rich and challenging, but are also extremely plot-driven." Presumably the game will be an action adventure then. Set for release second quarter of 2002.

# Mod Life

## SPOONMAN'S ROUNDUP OF ALL THE LATEST MOD NEWS

### GANGSTA WARS

**For** Half-Life
**Developer** The GW Team
**URL** gangster wars.thebackburner.com
**Release** 2.7

Gangtsa Wars is, as you'd expect, is a mod where you take the role of a gang member and try to 'bust a cap' in each other's neither regions. The best part of GW is the sheer number of modes available. There's Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch (nothing new here), then there's Capture the Stash, protect the Don and lastly, Gangbang. We will not endeavour to describe that one. Gangsta Wars is great, fun and something different. Download it today!

### CAPTURE THE GUNZ

**For** Quake 3
**Developer** EAV Team
**URL** www.planetquake.com/eaw
**Release** 2.0

Capture the Gunz is much like Domination for Unreal Tournament. Instead of controlling flags, you control weapons. Once you capture a weapon point, you and your team can then use that weapon. It adds an interesting twist if you're using the rocket launcher and in another part of the map the rocket launcher is taken over by the other team - suddenly you can't use it any more. Weapons are unchanged except for when you have all the weapon points. The team that does gets to select a cool powerup, such as the wonderful akimbo mode.

### UNREAL FORTRESS

**For** Unreal Tournament
**Developer** Mod Squad
**URL** www.unrealfortress.com
**Release** Build 600b

Unreal Fortress is quite similar to Team Fortress, as you might have guessed. In fact it's almost identical in most aspects. There are some differences, but as far as actual gameplay goes it's all been done before. The classes are almost identical except for a few different names. This is not a bad thing however, and if you're looking for a TF experience with Unreal this is it.

### SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY

**For** Half-Life **Developer** SI Software
**URL** www.planethalflife.com/si **Release** 0.97

I played Science and Industry a few months ago. It was a good mod but not worthy of the highest praise. Now after a few more months of development it looks much more like what it should have.
Science and Industry is Capture the Flag, but with scientists. You start with the bogstandard weapons and scientists research new things for you. You can vote mid-game as to what the scientists should build next. Of course the more scientists you have, the faster you research, so if you can capture one of the enemy's, then you'll get better weapons before they do. Older versions of Science and Industry just used the original Half-Life weapons, but the latest version includes a briefcase instead of the crowbar (which can be upgraded to a suicide bomb), rocket pistols, tommy guns and the ever funky GI Destabilizer, which is perfect if your opponent has just had lunch. Basically, if you looked at Science and Industry a while ago and thought it was ok, now is the time for a second look.

### SOUTHLAN

**Location** O'Conner QLD
**Date** Every Second Saturday (Ends 3:30 AM Sunday)
**Players** 50
**Price** $15 ($10 members)
**URL:** www.southlan.axg.net
A free for all LAN in no uncertain terms, plus it's on every two weeks. So if you miss one because you had to attend your cat's funeral, there's one just around the corner. All cabling and networking is supplied - all you need is your PC and some headphones. As far as games go, anything is worth a shot, so if you want to play network Tetris, feel free to rope some more people in.

### BURNIE GAMERS LAN

**Location** Burnie TAS
**Dates** Every second Sunday
**Players** 50 (more with advanced notice)
**Cost** $5
**Contact** gvowles@tassie.net.au
BGL is a LAN that caters for people who aren't necessarily into FPS Games 100% of the time. They've listed their favourite games as Delta Force, Land Warrior, UT and various RTS titles - if you're into games like these, BGL could be just the ticket. A good turnout means the possibility free pizza, not to mention game giveaways and extra cool stuff. A Great LAN for northern Tasmania.

### TRIBAL ANNIHILATION VI

**Location** Melbourne VIC
**Dates** 7/7/01
**Players** No Maximum (venue change if needed)
**Cost** TBA
**URL** www.webpage-creations.com.au/wpcsites/ta v/
Apparently the Tribal Annihilation LANs have become a big gathering for all the Tribes hot shots around Melbourne and they want fresh meat.. erm, new players. If you've been playing Tribes for the last two years in anticipation of overthrowing the best in the business, this LAN is definitely for you. Those interested in converting all the players to Counter-Strike are in the wrong place.

For submissions, email spoonman@next.com.au
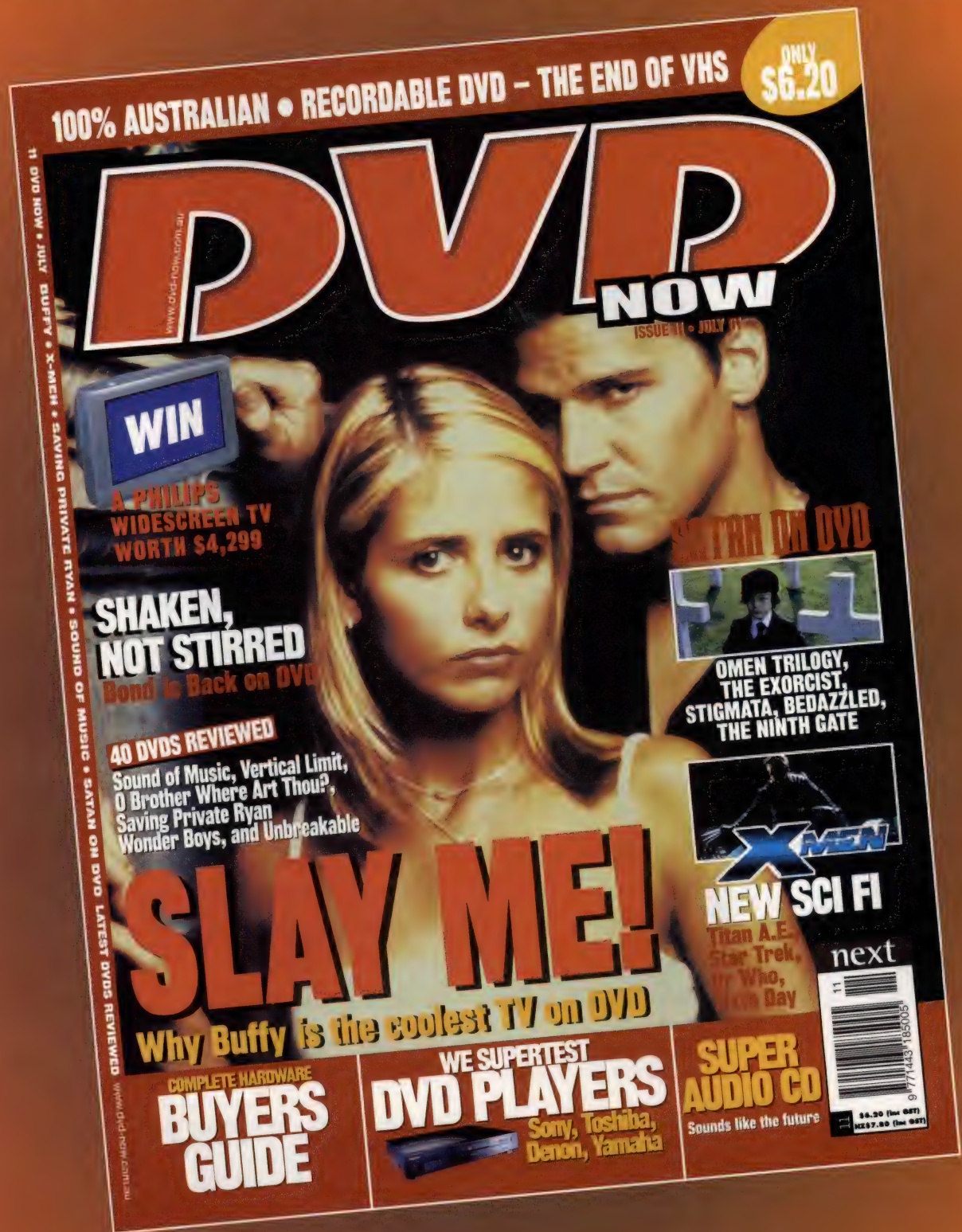
# FIRST LOOK



**STAR WARS BATTLEGROUNDS**    **Developer:** LucasArts    **Publisher:** LucasArts    **Available:** 4th Qtr

Epic realtime strategy over land, air and sea with six races, spanning the entire Star Wars saga



**PRISONER OF WAR**    **Developer:** Wide Games    **Publisher:** Codemasters    **Available:** 4th Qtr

Plan the Great Escape from notorious WWII prison camps with four specially skilled Allies



**GORASUL**    **Developer:** Silver Style    **Publisher:** JoWood    **Available:** 3rd Qtr

Lead the resurrected Roszondas, raised by Dragons, through this RPG journey set in the dark land of Gorasul



**SHEEP, DOG & WOLF**    **Developer:** Infogrames    **Publisher:** Infogrames    **Available:** 3rd Qtr

Steal sheep from the best in the business, Sam Sheepdog, in a serious puzzle game with a light heart

# DVDA

## WITH JAMES COTTEE

## THE SOPRANOS: SEASON ONE

Warner, MA

Fighting against the explosion of stupidity that's gripped TV lately, The Sopranos is intelligent, engaging, and above all entertaining. It revolves around Tony Soprano, his disfunctional nuclear family, his malevolent extended family, and of course his other Family, the Mafia. The twist is, Tony's seeing a shrink, a risky move for a mob boss. This boxed set contains 13 44 minute episodes, plus five docos and a video clip: 10 hours of the best TV drama available.

**SCORE** ●●●◖

### BUBBLEGUM CRISIS TOKYO 2040
Madman, M

If you've caught this series on SBS, but were put off by the American voice acting, then this DVD release may be for you. When viewed with the Japanese soundtrack it feels like a completely different program. If you haven't seen it, the show's about four attractive young women who fight slavering robot monsters with their form-fitting powered armour and bad attitudes. Heavily influenced by Blade Runner.

**SCORE** ●●●◖

### NEON GENESIS EVANGELION
Madman, PG

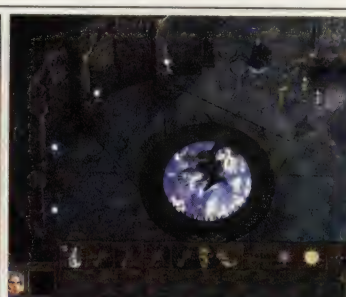Volume 3 of this ground breaking series sees Asuka move in Shinji and Misato. When the main character and two hot babes share a tiny flat, this means only one thing: fan service (read: panty shots). We also see some unusual giant robot combat techniques employed, such as synchronised dance moves, scuba diving in molten lava, and the use of medieval cutting weapons. Only three episodes, but still an essential purchase.

**SCORE** ●●●●

### SAMURI X: BETRAYAL
Madman, MA

The follow up to Samurai X: Trust. Kenshin has fled the authorities in 19th Japan, and holes up in the hills with an attractive young woman. He's got things pretty sweet, but little does he know that someone he trusts implicitly has got it in for him. Will he realise before it's too late, or will his angst finally consume him? Haunting direction, classy design, stunning animation, flawless transfer. Good buy!

**SCORE** ●●●●

### STRANGERS ON A TRAIN
Warner, PG

They don't call Hitchcock the master of suspense for nothing. The premise is simple; two men who both badly want someone dead meet by accident on a train. One of them suggests they swap the murders to confuse the cops. The other thinks it's a joke, until his wife turns up dead... Easily as good as Vertigo or North by Northwest, Strangers on a Train grips you to the very end. Both the US & UK versions included.

**SCORE** ●●●●

### BOILER ROOM
Roadshow, M

Wall Street, although hard hitting for its time, is by today's standards a quaint oddity, an innocent look into evil from the eighties. Boiler Room presents the viewer with a grittier, seedier, far more pa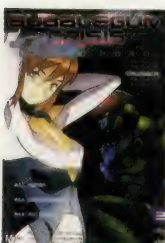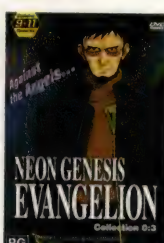thetic look at the stock market. Set in a crooked Long Island trading house that combines the worst aspects of telephone market research and Amway, this is a depressing look at human weakness, and the bastards who exploit it.
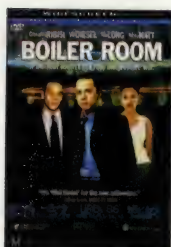
**SCORE** ●●●

### QUADROPHENIA

In the south of England, rival youth gangs pop pills, listen to awful repetitive music and hurl themselves into an abyss of violent self-destruction. This kind of behaviour is nothing new: Quadrophenia is set in 1964. The obsolete fashions the kids in this film pursue serves to amplify the moral: youth culture is stupid. Dune fans take note: This is Sting's first movie, and he makes a convincing mod.

**SCORE** ●●●

### RED PLANET
Roadshow, M

Those who haven't seen this movie, existing in a word-of-mouth blackout, may be suffering the delusion that it might be worth watching, if given a chance. Not so. Red Planet is a soporific excursion into inanity: flaccid pacing, a lack of scientific rigour and a pissweak anticlimax amongst its flaws. Deleted scenes are included on the disc, if you want to drag the agony out even further. Not Val Kilmer's best work.

**SCORE** ●

### THUNDERBIRDS: VOL 4

More classic moments from the greatest supermarionation series ever made. Four episodes on the disc; over three hours of rocket-age revelry, not even counting the extras. One of the best episodes in the series is included: "Move and you're dead." It's the one where Alan's stuck standing next to a motion-detector activated bomb in the blazing Californian sun. This means one thing: sweating puppets! F.A.B!

**SCORE** ●●●◖

# Coming soon

## JULY 2001
Alone in the Dark (Ozisoft)
Anachronox (Ozisoft)
Diablo II: Lord of Destruction (Jack of all Games)
Evil Twin (Ubisoft)
Max Payne (Jack of all Games)

## AUGUST 2001
Arcanum (Vivendi)
Corporate Machine (Jack of all Games)
Duke Nukem: Endangered Species (Jack of all Games)
Duke Nukem Forever (Jack of all Games)
Empire Earth (Vivendi)
Madden 2002 (Electronic Arts)
Mafia (Jack of all Games)
MechCommander 2 (Microsoft)
NHL 2002 (Electronic Arts)
Premier League Manager (Electronic Arts)
Red Faction (THQ)
Super Bombad Racing ( Electronic Arts)
Throne of Darkness (Vivendi)

## SEPTEMBER 2001
Alex Ferguson's Player Manager (Jack of all Games)
Champions League (Jack of all Games)
Commandos 2 (Ozisoft)
F1 2002 (Electronic Arts)
Flight Sim 2002 (Microsoft)
Motor City Online (Electronic Arts)
Myth 3 (Jack of all Games)
Pool of Radiance (Ozisoft)
Project Eden (Ozisoft)
Sid Meier's Sim Golf (Electronic Arts)
Stronghold (Jack of all Games)
Technomage (Ozisoft)
Zoo Tycoon (Microsoft)

## OCTOBER 2001
C&C Renegade (Electronic Arts)
Dungeon Siege (Microsoft)
FIFA 2002 (Electronic Arts)
Le Femme Nikita (Ozisoft)
Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault (Electronic Arts)
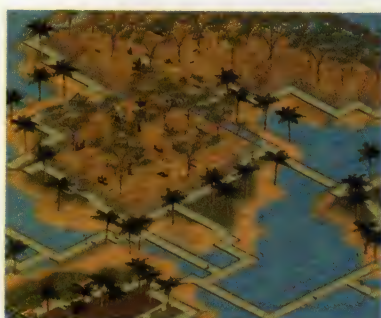
# Australia's most wanted

The April Fools debacle has helped to launch Duke Nukem Forever back into the hearts and minds of the nation's gamers. Yes indeed, half the list has a gun in its hand and the casualties in its heart. As one reader noted: "Bring on the shooters!"

Hype courtesy of our Coverdisc movie has Blue Shift debut in the list. Half Life 2 received big response and it has barely been announced. C'mon we're counting on you, Valve. Another title that made the top ten was Max Payne and now that E3 has been and gone, interest for this little baby is skyrocketing.

Castle Wolfenstein's quest for number one is foiled again, not only by Red Faction but DNF as well. Battle for Dune just made deadline for review this month and so makes space for some young blood. Hold onto your hats for some big titles reviewed next month!

This month's lucky winner is R. Stewart of Brisbane, Qld. A copy of Microsoft Train Sim is yours, good reader.
Send your Top Five most wanted games to: **wanted@pcpopwerplay.com.au**

| 1 | RED FACTION | ◄ |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Duke Nukem Forever | ◄ |
| 3 | Return to Castle Wolfenstein | ◄ |
| 4 | Half Life: Blue Shift | ◄ |
| 5 | Neverwinter Nights | ◄ |
| 6 | I - War 2 | ◄ |
| 7 | Doom 3 | ◄ |
| 8 | Half Life 2 | ◄ |
| 9 | Halo | ◄ |
| 10 | Max Payne | ◄ |

# dr claw

## WHAT'S ON THE PCPP WEBSITE?

hello you all thought i was dead didn't you yes you did because none of you like me i know don't try and pretend i can take rejection and hatred better than you because i am, as i say, 133+.

anyway i am still here to be the figurehead of our website at **www.pcpowerplay.com.au** where you can read all about the news and also chat in the forums where you can post on one of the many threads that impune my good name and hack on my (@+.

also if you really want to slag me off then there's nothing better than slagging me off in realtime so you should download mirc then come on to the official pcpp irc channel which you can connect to on any random austnet.org server. you just connect and then type /join #pcpp and you can talk to me and sekt and mrwaffle and headlesst although you will probably all gang up on me and call me lame and say i am not as good as some imaginary web guest star celebrity personality who can't even spell half as good as me.

irc is really good because you can find true love on irc i met my girlfriend crazyminx on irc she is my special friend and lives in montana on a dental floss plantation and i sent her my pic a good pic of me in my best shirt before my cat peed on it but she did not send me a pic because she says her religious father the dental floss tycoon would not let her but she said if i send her $49.95 a month she would show me a special site where i could see lots of pics of her and her best friend candy so i am saving up to see a picture of my irc girlfriend.

incidentally my cat is back from the vet and he is all better and he was so excited to see me he peed on my best shirt so it is not my best shirt anymore but i still love my (@+ and now i carry a pic of my cat next to the space where I will put a pic of crazyminx and her friend candy when I have saved up for them.

until next time keep being 133+ like me!

# Our most wanted

**DAVID Republic**
It will at last expose my despotic totalitarian tendencies

**ANTHONY Dune Generations**
Hopefully faithful to Frank Herbert's vision

**JOHN Jedi Outcast**
Deathmatch with light sabres!
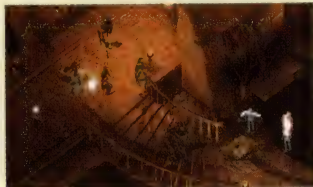
**TIM Throne of Bhaal**
It's time for the child of murder to stop being coy. Whoop ass!

# Games Chart

## THE BEST SELLERS THIS MONTH

### Top 20 Best Selling Full Price PC Games
(>$29.95 inc. GST)

| Position | | Game Title | Game Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | ⇧ | The Sims | Strategy |
| 2 | ⇔ | Myst III: Exile | Adventure |
| 3 | ⇧ | The Sims Collector's Ed | Strategy |
| 4 | ⇩ | The Sims House Party | Strategy |
| 5 | ⇧ | The Sims Livin' Large | Strategy |
| 6 | ⇔ | Sim City 3000 Unlimited | Strategy |
| 7 | ⇧ | Age Of Empires 2 | Strategy |
| 8 | ⇩ | Black & White | Strategy |
| 9 | ⇩ | Sim Mania Pack | Strategy |
| 10 | ⇩ | Sim Mania For Kids | Strategy |
| 11 | ⇔ | Age of Emp: Collector's Ed | Strategy |
| 12 | ⇧ | Diablo 2 | RPG |
| 13 | ⇔ | Cmmd & Cnqr Red Alert 2 | Strategy |
| 14 | ⇩ | Age of Emp. 2: Conqueror's Exp | Strategy |
| 15 | ✪ | Quake 3 Arena | Action |
| 16 | ✪ | Half Life Counter Strike | Action |
| 17 | ⇩ | Half Life Platinum | Action |
| 18 | ⇧ | Unreal Tournament | Action |
| 19 | ✪ | Links LS 2001 | Sports |
| 20 | ⇩ | Tribes 2 | Action |

# PC Games & the Massmarket

PUBLISHERS AND DEVELOPERS ALIKE ARE TALKING ABOUT TAKING GAMES INTO THE MAINSTREAM. BUT WHAT DO THEY MEAN? THE PCPP CREW INVESTIGATES...

**Moderator :** David Wildgoose

**Panel :** Anthony Fordham, Christian Read, John Dewhurst, James Cottee

**David:** What do we all consider the massmarket to be?

**James:** The Sims, Barbie, Pokemon...

**Anthony:** The massmarket is defined by when you stop caring about what individuals think, and only care about groups and demographics. Games are massmarket now because of all the clones. Emperor is a perfect example.

**DW:** Okay, what does Ed Fries from Microsoft mean when he says that games should break into the mainstream?

**John:** That they should sell more.

**Christian:** He wants a bigger market share.

**AF:** It seems that Ed Fries is lost in the past. Games are a multi-billion dollar industry, yet he seems to think it's not mainstream because music and film do so many units compared to games.

**DW:** He's saying more than that. He's saying that games aren't a part of everyone's life like TV.

**JD:** It's purely economic for him. Games could be exactly the same as they are now, but they're mainstream if they sell ten times as many copies.

but I don't think they're ever going to have the ease of access of a VCR, where you just put it on and it's there.

**DW:** So it's just inevitable that the market will grow?

**AF:** There's been research done into this. Every time there's new technology, one generation can't understand it while it becomes second nature for the next.

**DW:** Do game developers need to do different things to appeal to our mums and dads?

**JC:** Will they ever appeal to our parents?

**JD:** I don't think there's a market in old people games...

**DW:** What about The Sims?

**AF:** I think the success of The Sims...

**JD:** Be careful...!

**AF:** Okay, at the risk of sounding misogynist, the success of The Sims...

**JD:** Say I said that, alright?

**AF:** Whereas Emperor was a fairly cynical exercise...

**DW:** The Sims wasn't cynical.

**AF:** Yeah, Maxis sat down and said let's write a game about people. That was their motivation and that's why it

you need is the Xbox with Pokie-Max 2002 on it plugged in to your bank account and away you go. Once that happens this mainstream argument is going to vanish. People aren't going to be moving their Sims around, they're going to be obsessively compulsively destroying their lives.

**JD:** It'll be interesting when people start gambling in The Sims...

**DW:** Well, you can set up a casino in Sims Online. It's already happening.

**AF:** Back to realistic graphics, what programmers should be doing is not trying to render a human face down to every single pore, but trying to...

**JC:** ...capture the soul...

**AF:** ...yeah, by using three triangles and a light source.

**DW:** They need to think about realistic human interaction rather than shooting people and finding keys.

**CR:** What will appeal to girls is a lead female character who is not a figure of male ideal beauty. Girls like fiction about girls. They would like a strong, serious female lead.

**AF:** Jane bloody Austen!

**DW:** Wouldn't Pride & Prejudice make for a great game...

## Relationships

**AF:** I think a game where you have manage relationships between people, maintaining friendships...

**DW:** Like Republic?

**AF:** Maybe. I think that's going to focus more on backstabbing.

**JC:** One of the biggest genres in the world is the soap opera.

**DW:** That's exactly what The Sims is.

**JC:** Yes, soap! Interactive soap!

**AF:** Interactive soap?

**JC:** That's exactly what you described.

**AF:** It doesn't have to be as crap as soap opera, though.

**DW:** On a more abstract level, is it about moving away from goal-oriented gameplay towards more open-ended gameplay?

**JC:** Or process-oriented gameplay? Some of the best games ever have been without goals. Elite, for example,

there was no goal in that, you just flew around doing whatever you wanted.

**AF:** It had goals, like making money.

**DW:** They were of your own devising.

**CR:** Big gun gameplay is never going to penetrate the real massmarket.

**DW:** Which is odd when you consider how many people own guns...

**JD:** There's always going to be a market for that style of game. You use games to escape reality.

**CR:** But it's only going to reach a certain amount of people and then stop. It won't expand the market.

## Hardcore

**DW:** Are PC games too difficult?

**JD:** There's are new games that are targeted at people with no proficiency. And there's a whole community of gamers who would prefer things stayed more hardcore - you know, games that rely on people knowing the conventions of the past.

**DW:** Can we then create a game that pleases the mainstream as well as the hardcore gamer?

**JD:** Absolutely. It just needs different marketing. Any old game will do, as long as it's marketed the right way.

**DW:** Harpoon 4 could cross that bridge?

**JD:** Just put someone on the box with a cut-off t-shirt and a "Death to the whales" slogan on it...

**AF:** Hardcore gamers define themselves as gamers who play games no one else plays. They're just too hardcore!

**CR:** What, like Quake 3?

> people aren't going to be moving their Sims around, they're going to be obsessively compulsively destroying their lives

## Generation gap

**AF:** Isn't he talking about culture? Everyone listens to music, everyone goes to movies, everyone watches TV, but not everyone plays games.

**CR:** It takes effort to play games. You don't have to learn how to use television. But you pick up the average flight sim and... even I don't understand them.

**JC:** You have to learn how to do everything. You have to learn how to pull your pants on, drive a car, read, write. Generations are coming through now that know how to use a computer as a matter of course.

**CR:** Children are growing up with computers, they all know about them,

was so successful. Everyone knows about people.

**JD:** Not everyone knows about giants worms on some planet...

**CR:** Or female mentats!

## Gambling

**DW:** The technology we now have allows us to portray people in a relatively realistic way. Is this going to appeal to more people?

**JC:** Maybe to the womenfolk...

**JD:** At the risk of sounding misogynist!

**CR:** I would like to dissociate myself from all comments forthcoming.

**JC:** It's not just what the technology is, but how it's used. For instance, there are pokie machines filling up pubs. All

Your fragile hold on life is about to be threatened. This is fear as you've never known it— gut-wrenching and haunting. In the terrifying tradition of H. P. Lovecraft's classic nightmares. Spine-tingling graphics, blood-curdling effects and a beautifully smooth but deadly serious game engine. This is your ultimate apocalypse. Black fear has just come home to play.

Designed by demons.
Directed by fear.

# ALONE IN THE DARK
## THE NEW NIGHTMARE
In store June

# INBOX

## Letters Topic: Should David do a nude scene in his upcoming film?

Write to: PC PowerPlay Letters, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016 **Email:** letters@pcpowerplay.com.au



### TO ITS FULLEST

I'm just writing in to let you know my opinions of the most recent Counter-Strike versions (1.0 and 1.1). I, and I'm sure many others, are finding it hard to connect to a server and simply play without being called a cheat wall-hack, aimbot user, whatever! I don't know why people bother playing these games and enjoying them to their fullest when all they do is complain, accuse, and put down other players. It seems that when someone happens to have a very respectable score, people call them a cheat or a fluke. Counter-Strike is a great game, and very well could be life for some people, but going as far as calling people cheats and always fighting with others I see no point to playing. People like that ruin the great experience that Counter-Strike has to offer to gamers in the online community. To wrap it up, I think that people should just play and have fun and enjoy the game to its fullest.

**Dark Strider**

### TRACTION CONTROL

This weekend I managed to devote some time to trying out the demos on the May coverdisc. Having read the review of F1 Racing Championship I was intrigued. "The absolute best serious Formula One sim around". Let me ask you something.

What medication are you on? Has David even played F1 GP3? Does he know anything about motor racing (heck, has he ever driven a car?). What a load of rubbish!

First of all, I don't see any mention of weather in F1 RC. Did I miss it? I was intrigued to find out that F1 cars have a button that the driver presses when they want to do a burn out. I was also intrigued to find out that F1 cars appear to have ABS and traction control, two technologies which were removed from the F1 regulations before Villeneuve stepped into F1. (I found these two technologies to be present by hitting the brakes as hard as I could and hitting the accelerator as hard as I could - nothing happened). And to cap it all off - the sound is absolute crap. The engine sound is not even close to realistic.

When I look at pages 4 and 5 of the mag, an explanation leaps to mind - "Cash for comment..."

**Scott Southurst**

**I guess the issue here Scott is that the demo was not in fact representative of the game. We whipped out the demo again on** reading your comments, and the handling is significantly different. Rest assured though, the real thing is still a winner.

### SPECTACULAR TRACK

Delighted as I was to see the GeForce 3 video on the May coverdisc, it only added to my growing concern about the assumptions made by developers concerning the type of budget that some gamers are on.

Owning a PII with an ATi Rage and 32MB RAM, I am constantly finding it hard to run new games with a decent framerate (or even at all) on my system. I realise that many gamers have made a considerably higher outlay on their system, but some companies are still producing games with disturbingly high minimum system requirements.

Id software has a spectacular track record of producing games that are highly playable, graphically stunning and a pleasure to play, but if the Doom 3 engine will require the most advanced (and expensive) graphics card ever made, id will have lost half its market.

And yes, I soon plan to upgrade to an AMD Athlon and a Leadtek GeForce 2. I may have to wait a few years to play Doom 3, but the $1,200 outlay for the aforementioned equipment is small (not to mention a better investment) in comparison what I would be spending on a GF3.

**Matt Hannah, Brisbane**

**Even if you don't have a Geforce 3, you will be able to play the new Doom game. However, the point is that id will be optimising the**

---

### BYTE SIZE

You may want to have James Cottee followed...

**Alex Stainton**

**To be honest, we don't want to know where he's been.**

---

### BYTE SIZE

Happy April Fools Day, you bastards! I guess I've been waiting for sooo long for this that I was blinded by the little incongruities of the article (*the DNF review - Ed*). Well done for creating Max Payne!

**Pelejaks**

**Glad someone got the joke...**

engine to exploit the potential of nVidia's chipset.

## YOU ABBREVIATE

In that little GeForce 3 movie, Steve Jobs introduces John Carmack as founder of id Software. He pronounced 'id' as one word!

I always thought it was read the same way you abbreviate the word 'identification' as "I. D."

How has everyone else been pronouncing all along? I'm sure you guys know because you have interviewed the likes of Paul Steed and Graeme Devine.

**Jack Banh**

**Indeed, it is 'id' as opposed to an abbreviation. It's a reference to Freud's id and ego terminology. The ego left to form Ion Storm. Bwaha.**

## VOICING THEIR OPINION

I just had a look at Electronics Boutique's web site in the U.S. and saw that Serious Sam was selling for

### BYTE SIZE

With Black & White there are two boxes out on sale. The black one said that you can make an evil monster to wreck havoc on the people; and then there is a white box which said you can make a peaceful creature to help you with your work. Are these two different versions?

**A Zattelman**

**No. But the white box does look significantly better.**

### BYTE SIZE

Oh yeah, a word to your editor Mr Wildgoose, what stupid name is that, are you sick! Haven't you heard of deed poll.

**Frank Siavich**

**You do realise you're insulting thousands of hairy, flame-bearded Scots, don't you? Big mistake...**

US$19.99. I then called a local Melbourne EB store and was horrified when I was told it was $89.95. Please tell me they (distributors & EB) are not profiteering off us poor isolated Australian PC nuts. And please ask them to explain why Serious Sam is not retailing for around A$50. Other games at EB (i.e. Black & White) are $44.95 in the U.S. and about $89.95 here, which is perfect.

I for one will not buy Serious Sam until it is at an appropriate price. Will others who feel the same please support me by writing in to this mag and voicing their opinion not only about SS but the general profiteering that seems to go on with others products.

**George Tsalacopoulos**

**It is a shame, particularly for a game experience as shortlived as Serious Sam. The game's Australian distributor, Jack of all Games, has been satisfied with its sales. When determining the RRP, presumably they calculated that the possible extra sales at a lower price would**

### BYTE SIZE

By the way, a big HAPPY BIRTHDAY to PC PowerPlay!

**David Pohlenz**

**Why, thank you.**

not generate as much revenue. That's supply and demand for you. We would advise obtaining the Serious Sam test demo and leaving it at that.

## VAST EXPLORATION

I am dying to get my hands on a good space adventure game. I remember playing Privateer when I was a kid and thought it was great the way you had the resource management side, the shoot the pirates side and the vast exploration of space side. Although I don't remember this game getting great reviews at the time, I thought the idea behind it was well ahead of its time. I was wondering if there are any new games that run along these same lines currently available?

**Dominic Ryan**

**Currently? X: Beyond the Frontier is quite good, although it's heavey on the trade and light on the combat, but very much in the style of Privateer. Perhaps your best bet, though, is to wait for Freelancer, which is still being overseen at Microsoft by Privateer co-creator Chris Roberts.↓**

## ELECTED TO VOTE

In PCPP#60 on p53, you mentioned that Half-Life was not granted the cover spot because "We felt European Air War was going to be a bigger game..."

I am curious to know: are the minds behind that decision the same ones that elected to vote Deus Ex the "Best Game of All Time"?

**Nik McNulty**

**Hey now, we stand behind the assertation that Deus Ex is the best game of all time... except for maybe Planescape Torment. Remember, Deus Ex was also voted Game of the Year by you, our valued readers.**

### BYTE SIZE

Ultimately, Black & White is a god sim and as such, from my point of view, far less interesting than playing Deus Ex.

**Stuart Robertson**

**True.**



# LETTER OF THE MONTH

## ENGINE FIRST BUILT

Recently I was browsing the web and was struck down by the amount of mods out there. Now mods aren't necessarily bad things, but I believe that the scene needs to change in a big way.

One particular issue is the use of the Half-Life engine. I see so many mods just announced using an engine first built in 1996, before there were 3D cards. The Half-Life engine is based on the Quake 1 engine, people, so get over it. Too many times I see a promising mod team shoot themselves in the foot by using this old engine which simply cannot cope with what the designers expect it to.

**Chad Parkhill**

That's a good point, but bear in mind, the advantage of designing mods for a game such as Half-Life means that there are millions of potential players out there - everyone owns it. A developer might create the best editing tools ever for its game, but if no one has bought it then it's simply wasted.

# EUROFIGHTER TYPHOON



| DEVELOPER | PUBLISHER |
|---|---|
| DID | Rage Software |
| **AVAILABLE** | **URL** |
| July 2001 | http://www.rage.co.uk/ |

Eurofighter Typhoon updates DID's previous, and popular EF2000 title with hard data about the same aircraft in its newest incarnation. It also makes the Russians attack that vitally important strategic location, Iceland. The unique feature of typhoon is that the player chooses six pilots to play, scattered around various airfields in Iceland. Each has different abilities and faces different challenges, each can die, but none can be replaced. Interestingly enough, EuroFighter 2000 was renamed EF2000 for sale in the US, since research shows that if the Yanks spy the word 'Euro' attached to a title, they'll run a mile rather than buy it.

# BATTLE FOR MIDWAY



| DEVELOPER | PUBLISHER |
|---|---|
| Abacus Software, Inc. | Abacus Software, Inc. |
| **AVAILABLE** | **URL** |
| July | http://www.abacuspub.com/ |

The Battle For Midway is a rather lavish expansion pack for Microsoft's Combat Flight Simulators 1 and 2. Abacus Software brings you ten of the most famous U.S. and Japanese planes used in the Midway and the Coral Sea arenas as well as two bonus planes - the twin tailed P-38 Lightning and J7W Shinden 'Pusher'. Of course you also get a swag of new missions based on historical encounters in the Pacific Theatre around the Midway islands and the Coral Sea. Hopefully you'll also be able to bomb some Americans in 'friendly fire' incidents, just like they did to us. And also hopefully there'll be more to the game than endless Pacific atolls...

# IL-2 STURMOVIK



| DEVELOPER | PUBLISHER |
|---|---|
| Maddox Games | Blue Byte |
| **AVAILABLE** | **URL** |
| Q4 2001 | http://www.bluebyte.net/il2-e/ |

The IL-2 came as a shock to the Luftwaffe who didn't think the Soviets capable of advanced engineering, and an even bigger shock to the German tank crews who thought it was jolly unsporting. They would have been even more shocked if they'd realised that a lot of the IL-2's pilots were women. Sturmovik is probably the most eagerly awaited combat flight sim of the year and it's not hard to see why. An original setting, (the Eastern Front) previously un-simmed (we invented that word just for this article, aren't you lucky we go to such trouble?) aircraft, and it looks yummy too. intriguing idea.

# FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2002



| DEVELOPER | PUBLISHER |
|---|---|
| Microsoft | Microsoft |
| **AVAILABLE** | **URL** |
| TBA | http://www.microsoft.com/games |

The venerable Flight Simulator series has been with us almost as long as smallpox and had modders working on it before the term 'modder' was even invented. If there's a civilian plane out there without a Flight Simulator version of it on the net then it isn't worth flying. FS2002 will be offering the usual upgraded graphics engine and hardware support, including a fab new terrain renderer, and some more interesting stuff as well. Radio traffic in the game will be simulated as a real environment and the pilot will have to deal with this heightened level of communication to navigate around the gameworld, taking the FS experience further than ever before.

## ECHELON



| DEVELOPER | PUBLISHER |
|---|---|
| Bethesda | Bethesda |
| **AVAILABLE** | **URL** |
| November | http://echelon.bethsoft.com/ |

Echelon is not a Flight Simulator in the sense that it simulates modern or historical aircraft, but it is also not just an action shooter. It uses real flight dynamics and physics but places the game in a sci-fi setting, the world of Velian in fact. The game uses a rather spectacular 3D engine whose landscapes incorporate a lot of detail and will apparently offer full support for the GeForce 3 chipset. For the first time experience the reality of advanced tachyon-based weapons on a modern battlefield! If you like the feel of flight but are bored with both contemporary and historical settings Echelon might be what you're after.

## FLYIT F-16 C



| DEVELOPER | PUBLISHER |
|---|---|
| FLYIT Simulators | N/A |
| **AVAILABLE** | **URL** |
| 2002 | http://www.flyit.com/ |

For a cool US$100,000 this baby is all yours. The official blurb: "The FLYIT F-16 C Deployable Mission Rehearsal simulator is totally self-contained with a diesel generator and 120v 240v external power connectors. Out-the-window view is projected on an 8' wide by 7' high screen. Up to twenty-five cockpits can be networked to fly missions. Instant Combat - puts you into battle without preliminaries. Dogfight - puts you head to head with other cockpits or against the computer. Tactical Engagement - allows complex missions to be planned and flown." This gem is an exact working replica of the F-16C's cockpit and will be offered for sale to the many countries that use the F-16 in their armed forces.

# STATE OF PLAY
## FLIGHT SIMULATORS

**U**nlike any pure gaming genre such as the first person shooter or real time strategy, the simulation genres by their very nature have advanced more as a direct result of increased computer power rather than developments in game design ideas.

If you're a relative newcomer to games that fly, a visit to the flight sim museum at **www.migman.com** will give you a good idea of where the genre has been. Marvel at how a Texas Instruments calculator also contained the world's first commercially available civilian flight simulator or how a small jumble of green and yellow pixels was once easily recognised as a BF109G by avid SWOTL (Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe) fans and read the recollections of old school gamers and their explanation of the types of missions written into these old titles.
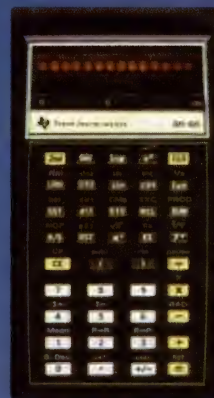
Those mission types will still be familiar to modern flight simmers because that's what military aircraft do, it's just the sophistication of the way they do it which has changed. Of course that doesn't mean that there's nothing to look forward to other than ever increasing amounts of graphic detail. Now that the technology exists to really do what game designers have been dreaming of for years we can only hope that it will be design that begins to dominate over technology, and ideas that drive new flight sim concepts rather than pixel fill rates.

The makers of Microsoft's Crimson Skies would certainly agree and the commercial success of that game will encourage others to follow suit. One of the biggest influences on the future development of flight sims however will surely be the slowly emerging broadband technologies. These will certainly create the right conditions for a quantum leap in the complexity of massively multiplayer flight sims, which have already been around for a while in the US but unavailable anywhere else due to the obvious lag problems.

Of course the other big influence will be, as always, the profit motive - what will gamers want to buy? Publishers, not developers, have to ask that question and they know that an innovative but dull game isn't worth the box it's wrapped in. On a purely theoretical level we can say that the level of interactivity, co operation and detail in on line and solo flight sims will continue to increase but do gamers really want to spend a month learning how to play a game before they can compete with other players? Commercial realities are often ignored in discussions such as this; if people won't buy super realistic sims then perhaps Crimson Skies is a much more prophetic product than people realise. Perhaps *it* is the future of flight sims?

**George Soropos**

## THE FUTURE OF GAMES

It's humanly impossible to see every game at E3. By our calculations one would need to see one game every 13.6 seconds in order to gain a comprehensive insight. And of course that leaves precious little time to play anything.

As such, our objective was clear: we only wanted to see the best on offer. Before arriving we had a pretty good idea of the games we desperately had to see (and play!), and most of them failed to let us down. But as usual we managed to encounter a few pleasant surprises along the way. Here, then, is a speedy tour across the highlights of E3 2001. With it, hopefully, you'll get a glimpse into the future of games...

## AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

**DEVELOPER**
Ensemble Studios

**PUBLISHER**
Microsoft

**AVAILABLE**
2002

**URL**
www.ensemblestudios.com

After our preview last month, it was good to see Ensemble's "godlike" realtime strategy title in action. Fans of Age of Empires won't be disappointed, as Bruce Shelley was keen to emphasise Mythology's familiar gameplay mechanics. This is a traditional RTS in every way, only polished to perfection. Innovation - who needs it?

## WARCRAFT 3

**DEVELOPER**
Blizzard

**PUBLISHER**
Blizzard

**AVAILABLE**
4th Qtr

**URL**
www.blizzard.com

Warcraft 3 drew huge crowds at its second showing at E3. Few dissenting voices could be heard amid the hordes of slavering onlookers keen to experience the Blizzard formula once again. Like Age of Mythology, this charted little unknown territory, with the once vaunted roleplaying elements now more notable for their absence. Should sell millions, then.

## GHOST RECON

**DEVELOPER**
Red Storm

**PUBLISHER**
Ubisoft

**AVAILABLE**
4th Qtr

**URL**
www.redstorm.com

We had heard that Red Storm was working on another Rainbow Six game, but this was our first glimpse of it in action. First impressions suggest that Tom Clancy would be proud - his name is again meier-ed to it, after all.

As with Rogue Spear, the concept is centred once more on squad-based tactical action, only this time the battle is at not quite so close quarters. Joining the likes of nearly every FPS on show, Ghost Recon is all about large outdoor environments. Although the maps on display were not as expansive as some (such as Planetside), the player will still be engaging the enemy at distances of several hundred metres. Unsurprisingly, the sniper rifle will be drawn from the squad's arsenal with great regularity.

The player's roster of potential squaddies is filled with a mix of specialists and cannon fodder troops. A maximum of nine (teamed up into groups of three) can be selected for any one mission, while those who survive will gain experience and improve their skills throughout the campaign. Elements new to the Rainbow Six series include the pre-mission planning map being replaced by the ability to direct movements and change tactics on-the-fly and the rather cool ability to take cover in a prone position while picking off the enemy from distance.

Red Storm's new engine is attractive and the balance of outdoor and indoor locations seems about right. The AI was lacking in the version we saw, but it's still being tweaked. A promising debut.

# REPUBLIC

**DEVELOPER**
Elixir Studios

**PUBLISHER**
Eidos

**AVAILABLE**
2nd Qtr 2002

**URL**
www.elixir-studios.co.uk

**R** epublic: The Revolution is our choice as the Game of E3 2001. Although there were a number of genuinely exciting titles on show over the three days, selecting just one Game of Show was a simple matter. Elixir Studios' debut has reaffirmed our faith in game development that can push the envelope in terms of technology AND gameplay design.

Republic impressed in terrific style. It showcased a developer fully prepared to take enormous risks, while the progress Elixir has made since last year was ample evidence those risks are about to pay off. Twelve months ago, Republic was little more than a technology demo - and an extremely slow, unoptimised one at that. There were hints of greatness, and Demis Hassabis (the game's lead designer) was certainly persuasive in his enthusiasm, but it was difficult to look

## Republic showcased a developer fully prepared to take enormous risks

beyond the painful framerate and apparent lack of anything to actually do.

And now? This year, Hassabis was able to present to us the most daring and original PC game in development. Better yet, he was actually playing it.

Republic is all about politics. If that sounds dull, just think for a moment what politics itself is all about: interaction between people. In Republic, the player is a leader of a political faction in a small town in the fictional state of Novistrana. Gameplay mechanics revolve around networking with over 300 unique characters as you wheel and deal your way to overthrowing the President.

There are three resources - Force, Wealth and Influence - drawn from the popular support gained by the player, from the working class, middle class, and upper class, respectively. The various actions available to further your drive to the top (at this stage there are around 250 different actions) all require the use of a combination of these resources. On one hand, to hire some thugs to rough up a political rival would just take Force; on the other, broadcasting propaganda in primetime would require Wealth and Influence to certain degrees.

To encapsulate the genius behind Republic in 350 words is futile. But hopefully we've whetted your appetite in preparation for an extensive preview soon. Viva la revolution!

## LOCK ON

**DEVELOPER**
SSI

**PUBLISHER**
Ubi Soft

**AVAILABLE**
July 2001

**URL**
www.ubisoft.co.uk

Take to the skies in this air combat title that will combine realistic battle, intense flight action and robust multiplayer options to offer a complete flight esperience. Pilot eight US and Russian jets including the A-10 Warthog and the Su-27 Flanker. Look forward to realistic physics like turbulence and concussion waves amidst the lush, detailed scenery.

## TORN

**DEVELOPER**
Black Isle Studios

**PUBLISHER**
Interplay

**AVAILABLE**
November

**URL**
torn.blackisle.com

The Black Isle RPG minus D&D rule set, using a realtime version of the SPECIAL system developed for Fallout. Torn is a skills based, realtime 3D RPG with six playable races and four schools of magic in a dynamic fantasy world. Co-op play with up to five others via LAN or internet means solo or group adventuring are both catered for.
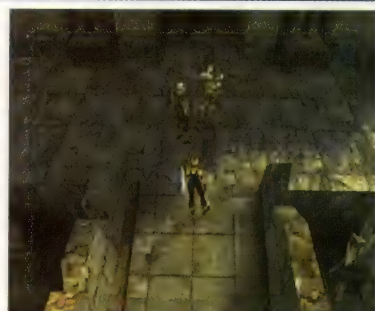
## MAX PAYNE

**DEVELOPER**
Remedy/3D Realms

**PUBLISHER**
Gathering of Developers

**AVAILABLE**
July

**URL**
www.maxpayne.com

Noir-inspired, heavy gunplay in New York's seamy underbelly with the most realistic in-game vision ever. Max Payne promises fast shooter action with scaling difficulty that adjusts to the player's skill, as well as bullet slow motion mode and photo-realistic textures. Also accessible level design tools and a level of environmental interaction never before seen.

# GALLEON

I t's tough to describe Galleon. Comparison – with Tomb Raider, Zelda, Oni, even Sonic the Hedgehog (bear with us here, please) – offers an approximation but hardly does justice to Confounding Factor's debut title. Prosaic description – an action adventure with an innovative control method – suggests a starting point but further elaboration is required. In convenient fashion, Galleon creator Toby Gard was on hand at the show to do exactly that.

The first thing Gard was keen to impress upon anyone encountering Galleon was its unique controls. Every single character action is based around analogue movement; indeed the entire interface has been built on the presumption of an analogue input device. On Xbox this works fine - its default controller has two analogue sticks. On PC this is an issue

## Gard showed Rhama clambering up sheer cliffs and swinging unsupported across the very ceiling of a large cavern

of concern - few PC gamers even own gamepads, let alone Xbox equivalents. How the developer shoehorns the advantages of its interface into the typical mouse/keyboard setup may well decide the game's fate.

So how does it work? There's a 'safety zone' at the centre of the analogue stick where lead character Rhama can walk around with ease, carefully avoiding potential pitfalls. Push the stick out of this zone, however, and things get risky; Rhama can now run with great speed, jump further and reach otherwise inaccessible areas, but he is proportionately more vulnerable to danger, losing his foothold and plummeting to his death.

Gard demonstrated this in action: first Rhama tiptoed with assurance across a row of stalacmites; second he sprinted across them, only to slip and fall yet fortuitously grab onto a ledge on the way down. Later Gard showed Rhama clambering up sheer cliffs, leaping from branch to branch, and swinging unsupported across the very ceiling of a large cavern. If it wasn't for his distinct pirate outfit, one might have been fooled into thinking this was the just-announced Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon game. It's just achingly cinematic.

Lara is dead. Long live Rhama.

## ARCANUM

**DEVELOPER**
Troika Games

**PUBLISHER**
Sierra

**AVAILABLE**
August

**URL**
www.ubisoft.co.uk

With the over-abundance of stereotypical D&D worlds at present, it was heartening to spend a few minutes inside Arcanum's imaginative roleplaying universe. The mix of magic and technology is no novelty, but rather forms the crux of the story. Troika was showing a virtually complete version of the game, so we're hoping for a review next month.

## MASTER OF ORION 3

**DEVELOPER**
Quicksilver

**PUBLISHER**
Infogrames

**AVAILABLE**
2nd Qtr 2002

**URL**
www.quicksilver.com

It's been in development for some time now, but Quicksilver had been careful not to reveal too many details of its MOO sequel prior to E3. One can now understand why, as plenty of changes have been introduced to the game fundamental design in a move sure to displease veteran fans. We'll take a more in-depth look at MOO3 soon.

## GLOBAL OPERATIONS

**DEVELOPER**
Barking Dog Studios

**PUBLISHER**
Crave Entertainment

**AVAILABLE**
4th Qtr

**URL**
www.barking-dog.com

Counter-Strike killer that takes the best of CS and Team Fortress to make the best squad based firstperson action to date. Featuring real world conflicts, weapons and squads based on actual peace keepers, terrorists and guerillas. An emphasis on specialised skills and classes means Global Ops gives a new definition of co-operation in combat. The multiplayer event of 2002.

# STAR WARS GALAXIES

## RALLY TROPHY

Historic racing sim that features classic rally style racing in stunning visual detail, complete with particle effects and reflections. No advanced settings, no radio contact, only the driver's ability and the road. Cars include the Ford Cortina and Saab 96 V4.

Galaxies found a captive audience at E3 because naturally the world is dying for the chance to live and breathe in the Star Wars universe. Set in the "classic era" after the destruction of the first Death Star and the Battle of Yavin, this massively multiplayer online RPG gives players the chance to play a bounty hunter, trader, Jedi or countless other sought after roles.

The eight playable races are Wookiee, Zabrak, Human, Bothan, Rodian, Mon Calamari, Trandoshan, and Twi'lek. Galaxies is skills based (not class-based) and will offer considerable freedom in customising your character. There are no racial restrictions for class choices. Skill points can be reallocated if a certain type of character becomes tiresome and appearances can be altered. That's not to say that there won't be any depth to the play.

The innovations promised in Star Wars Galaxies will seriously address the problems that have hampered other MMORPGs, particularly Ultima Online. Strong measures to counteract camping and player killing. Skill trees will offer access to specialised skills in many professions or vocations, should they be a store owner, mercenary and any where in between. Those dedicated enough will find themselves among the Star Wars character elite such as the Jedi (or Dark Jedi) bounty hunters.

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# AGE OF WONDERS 2

Fantasy realtime strategy that continues the strengths of the first, with a stronger emphasis on magic. Build and control wizard towers, temples and units to send in to battle the forces of your enemy. Schools of magic, research and an enhanced simultaneous turn-based mode keeps up the pace of the game for furious LAN battles.

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# DARK AGE OF CAMELOT
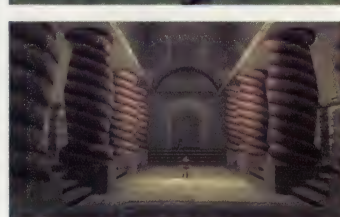
This online RPG is set in Arthurian legend, after the king's untimely death. Class-based, it will offer the chance to play as fighter, rogue, magician, deric or a combination of fighter and spellcaster. Offering an all-round roleplaying experience for early characters, when higher levels are attained, player vs player quests are undertaken to defend the realm from invaders.

# PRAETORIANS

A tactical realtime strategy set in the time of the Roman Empire. Take control of a dozen different troop types including pikemen, archers and praetorians (a bodyguard of the Roman emperor). An extensive campaign encompassing battlefields in Gaul and Egypt as well as multiplayer modes means Praetorians is a title to mark for closer attention in the future.
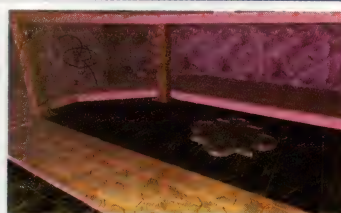
# EVERQUEST
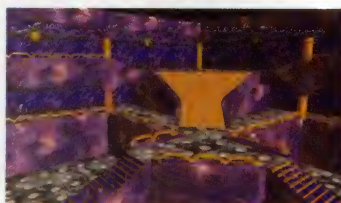
Everquest's third expansion pack, subtitled Shadows of Luclin, will offer more for the long time fan of the online RPG. Features a greatly improved 3D graphics engine, a new starting city (amongst 25 extra play areas) and one additional player character race (Kerran) and class (Beastlord). Should mean EverQuest stays competitive amid the stampede of new online RPGs.
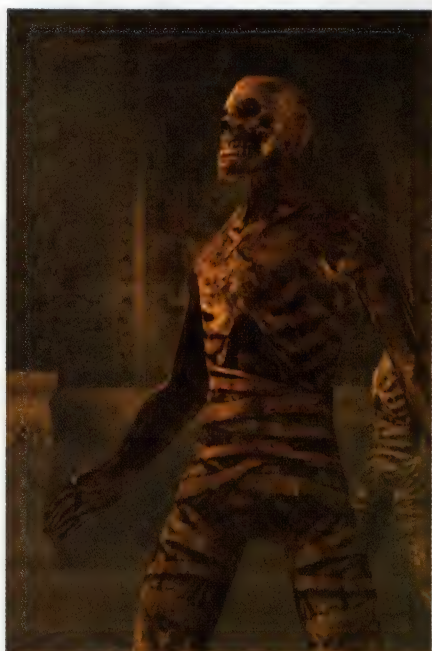
# RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

**It's been a long time between drinks for our WWII hero B.J. Bazkowicz. Last seen in Wolfenstein 3D, he makes a return ten years later to battle the bogeymen (Nazis and supernatural) of Castle Wolfenstein - trying his hand in the much evolved world of firstperson shooters. Heads turned at E3 to this follow-up - a folkloric moment for those old enough to remember the first "3D" shooter.**

Using the Quake 3 Arena engine, Gray Matter has gone all out in the AI department. The Half-Life legacy is strong and a definite aim in Return to Castle Wolfenstein is to create the most devilish, ingenious and toughest enemies ever seen.

Enemies will now actively assess the combat situation and respond logically, as demonstrated by in-game footage: a Nazi runs out of ammo, so he runs for cover then reloads. Toss a grenade, the schutzstaffle might toss it right back - they might also get an arm blown off in the process.

Environmental interaction too is at a premium. Chairs can be picked up and tossed at enemies lending some Jackie Chan-esque comedy to the game - maybe...

Boasting a new scripting system, the single player game will rely on a strong story to maintain that white-knuckled atmosphere and fire enthusiasm. Add to that the stunning textural detail that screenshots just can't convey and the next step in action gaming is all but assured.

# IL-2 STURMOVIK

Battle over the Eastern Front in WW2 in the toughest little plane of the time: the Sturmovik as well as 20 other land and air units for the Russians and Germans. Extensive campaigns and 32 player multiplayer dogfighting.
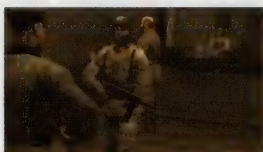
# PLANETSIDE

**DEVELOPER**
Verant

**PUBLISHER**
Ubisoft

**AVAILABLE**
2002

**URL**
www.station.sony.com/planetside

W e'll happily admit to being wrong about Planetside. A certain jadedness had initially clouded our view of Verant's new action game, a situation not aided by its visual similarity to Halo – you know, the visored soldiers, the outdoor terrain, those bloody jeeps. But, now that we've actually played it and had our scepticism firmly rebutted by the game's lead designer, we can confirm just how misguided we were. Planetside will rock with previously unimaginable force.

The main distinction between Planetside and Halo is that the latter merely allows for multiplayer combat. Planetside, on the other hand, grabs the player by the collar, roughs

## grabs the player by collar and hurls them into a massive persistent online world

them up a bit, then hurls them into a massive, persistent state, online world. This is Tribes 2, but on a vast scale. Verant has plans to set up servers all over the world, each one capable of hosting 3,000 players.

When you step into the Planetside universe, the first action will be to join a faction. Verant has yet to reveal exactly how many factions will be in the final game, but there will be more than two. As a persistent world, the factions will continue to wage war even while you are not logged on. During these 'down times' each player has an apartment located in his faction's base. Weapons and various items of equipment can also be stored here. Experience points are gained through completing various mission objectives and racking up frags. These can then be allocated to over 70 different skills in a move destined to encourage teamwork among skilled and unskilled players alike.

Money can also be invested in a number of implants (comparable to the augmentations in Deus Ex). Vehicles will feature prominently, thanks to a showroom of jeeps and aircraft. Again, the emphasis is on cooperation, with each vehicle having room for passengers and gunners.

Witnessed in action, Planetside's engine is spectacular. Each map - or continent - is approximately 64 square kilometres in size. This is certainly the firstperson shooter to watch in 2002.
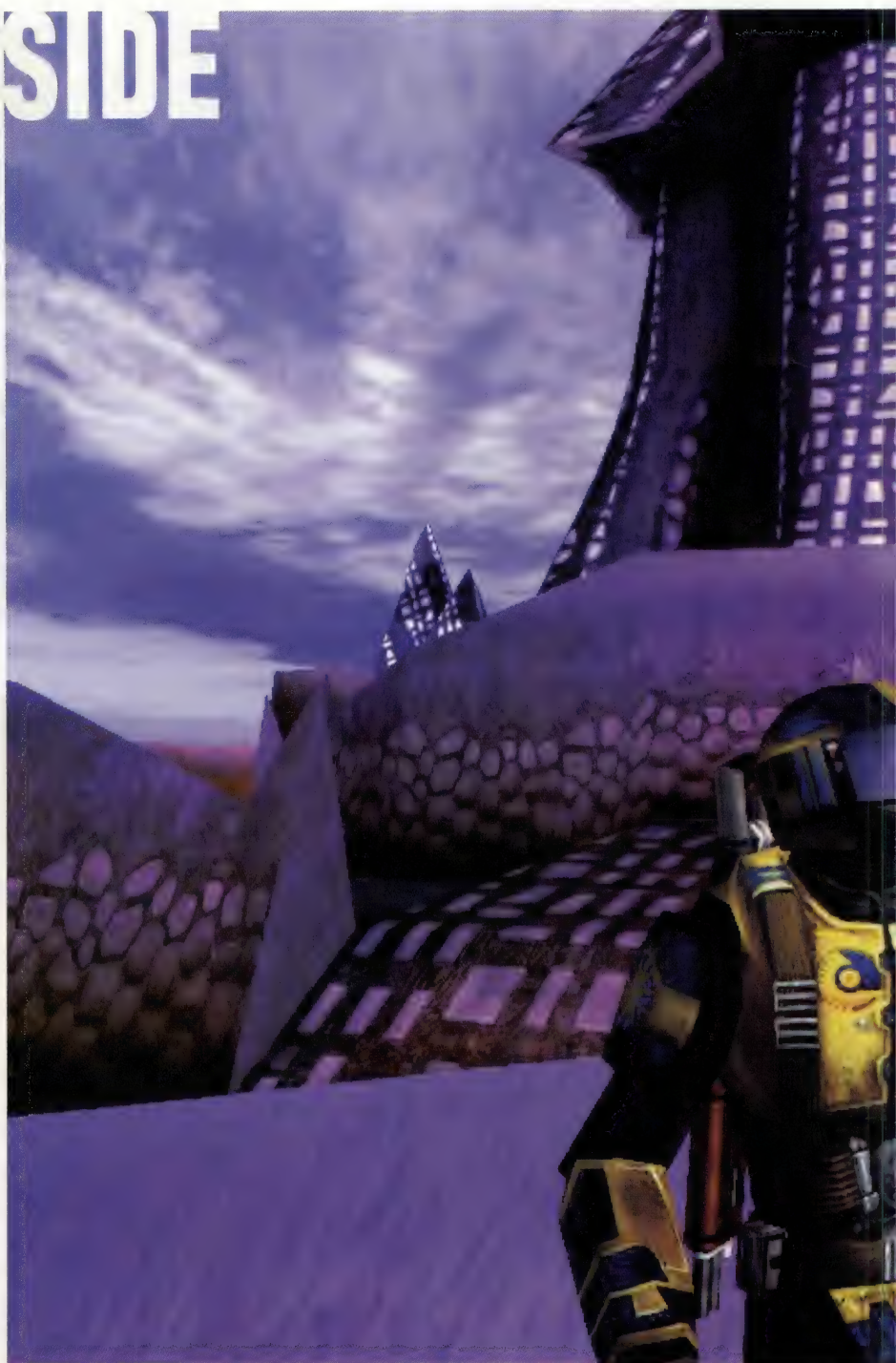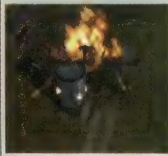
## CIVILIZATION 3

**DEVELOPER**
Firaxis

**PUBLISHER**
Infogrames

**AVAILABLE**
November

**URL**
www.firaxis.com

With a confirmed release date of November this year, Civ 3 looked remarkably solid. Firaxis has done much more than a mere graphical nip and tuck; areas such as diplomacy and trade have been boosted significantly for this third iteration. Emphasis is now firmly on controlling territory rather than cities, making for a less abstract and more plausible scenario.

## FREEDOM FORCE

**DEVELOPER**
Irrational Games

**PUBLISHER**
Crave

**AVAILABLE**
4th Qtr

**URL**
www.myfreedomforce.com

Brash and colourful, the decidedly over-the-top action of Freedom Force was a breath of fresh air amongst the orcs and elves of other RPGs at the show. It seems necessary to pause the game frequently to issue orders, but rather than detracting from the experience it lends a distinctive comic strip feel (like a series of frames in a comic book). Nice interface as well.

## MEDAL OF HONOR

**DEVELOPER**
2015

**PUBLISHER**
Electronic Arts

**AVAILABLE**
November

**URL**
mohaa.ea.com
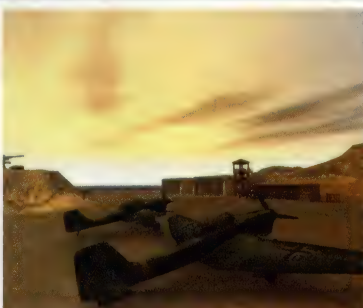
Boasting one of the more visceral demonstrations this year, 2015's follow-up to the PSX original was probably the most impressive singleplayer firstperson shooter on display. After witnessing the astounding Omaha beach landing that serves as a playable intro to the game, those Saving Private Ryan comparisons appear valid. Yet hopefully the whole game won't be quite so tightly scripted.
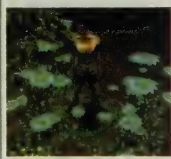
# EMPIRE EARTH

**DEVELOPER**
Stainless Steel Studios

**PUBLISHER**
Sierra

**AVAILABLE**
August

**URL**
www.empireearth.com

O ne realtime strategy title stood head and shoulders above the crowd this year. While Warcraft 3 and Age of Mythology were predictably polished retreads of past glories, and the likes of Sigma showed immense promise but were still in their early stages, Empire Earth was not only close to completion but close to genius as well. Last year we were wowed by the concept; this year it was the execution that took the breath away. Empire Earth truly is Civilization in realtime.

The scope of the game is incredible, spanning 500,000 years of human history (and future history) from blokes with sticks to robots with lasers. The player will advance through twelve 'epochs' throughout the game, each time given the option of upgrading surviving units for a considerable resource cost. In this

## watching each battle unfold is as pleasurable as gaining victory

way, your initial caveman may well become a mech pilot if he manages to live long enough. In multiplayer games there will be the option to choose a starting epoch and limit the number of epochs players can progress through.

The game now looks incredible, too. A 3D engine doesn't add significantly to the gameplay, but when done with this panache it lends enviable visual class. Empire Earth is probably the best-looking strategy game to be released this year.

The detail on the units is terrific, and coupled with the sheer diversity on offer, watching each battle unfold is as pleasurable as gaining victory.

One of the areas showing the greatest improvement is the camera control. The version demonstrated last year revealed a traditional fixed viewpoint (similar to Warcraft 3). This year's version boasted a simple but supremely cool zoom function. It works like this: as you zoom in (using a mousewheel), the camera gradually levels out until eventually it feels like you're standing on the battlefield itself. The effect is so much more immersive than in other games where the angle of the camera doesn't change. Better yet, it's no more complicated to achieve. We're counting the days until we get the chance to conquer the world.
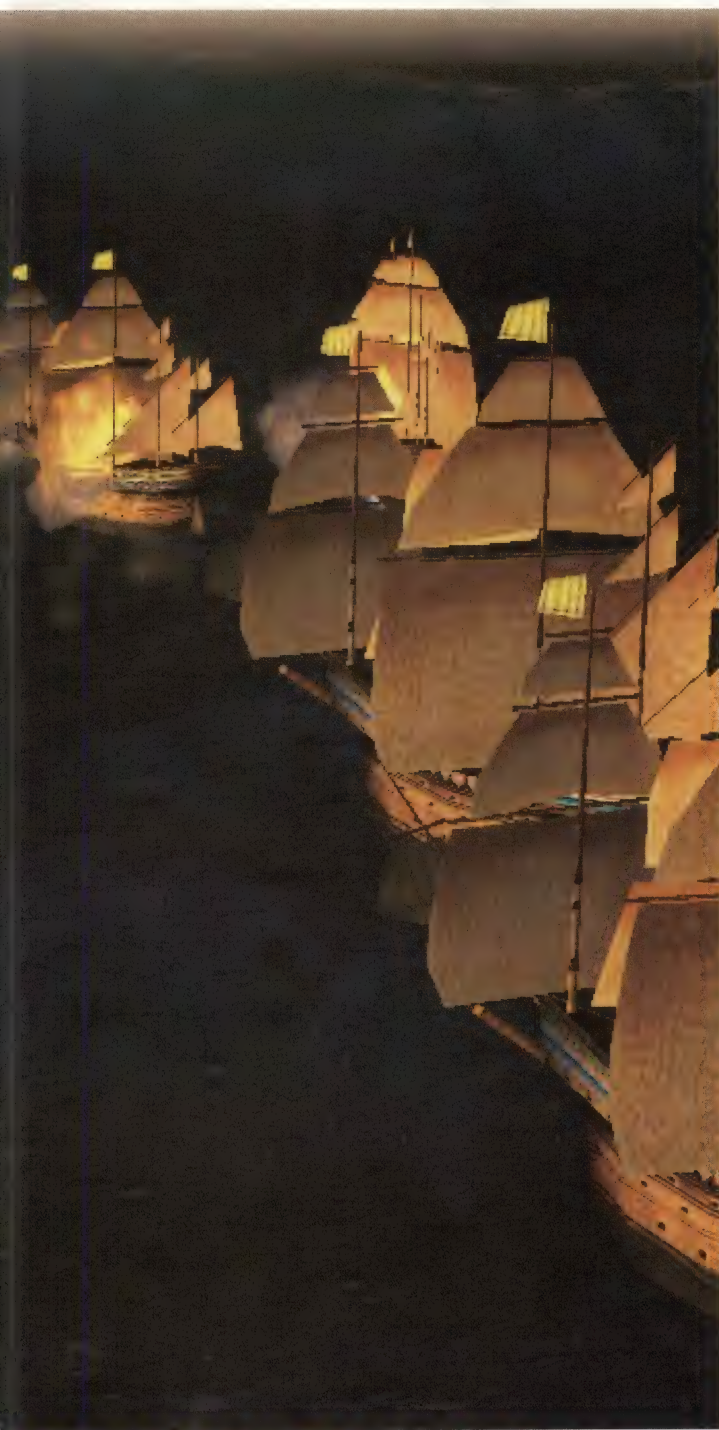
## C&C RENEGADE

**DEVELOPER**
Westwood

**PUBLISHER**
Electronic Arts

**AVAILABLE**
October

**URL**
www.westwood.com

The idea behind Renegade is admirable: to put the player in the middle of a C&C battlefield. On this evidence, there's still some way to go. Transplanting the mechanics of an RTS into a firstperson shooter has added plenty of depth - destroying enemy harvesters will change the tide of the war - but it's a shame that as a shooter it feels somewhat lacklustre.

## YAGER

**DEVELOPER**
Yager

**PUBLISHER**
THQ

**AVAILABLE**
2002

**URL**
www.yager.de

German developer Yager's upcoming futuristic air combat game still goes by its self-titled codename. Behind the enigmatic name though lies a startlingly cool game. It's a narrative-driven shooter where the player pilots an agile aircraft capable of the tremendous speed of a jetfighter and the covert operations of a helicopter. The graphics engine is powerful, too.
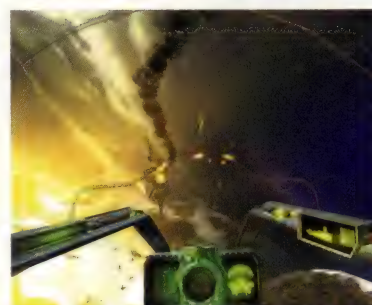
## ANARCHY ONLINE

**DEVELOPER**
Funcom

**PUBLISHER**
Funcom

**AVAILABLE**
3rd Qtr

**URL**
www.anarchyonline.com
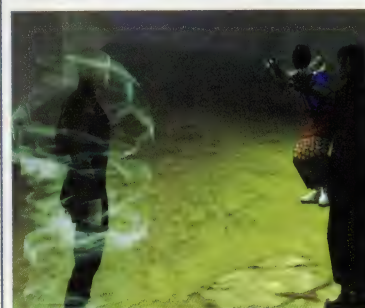
After the wizards and pixies of so many other online RPGs, it's refreshing to spend some time in Funcom's Anarchy Online. Here, tedious skills accumulation takes a back seat as social interaction and cooperation amongst the players is heavily rewarded. Having just entered its fourth beta stage, Anarchy is now just around the corner.

# FREELANCER

## FLIGHT SIM 2002

After embarrassing ourselves at Train Sim (we set a record for the quickest crash at the show), it was hoped Flight Sim 2K2 would offer a more leisurely pursuit. The new ability to land on water was a blessing, let us tell you.

**Chalking up a third consecutive appearance at E3, Microsoft's ambitious space simulator looked better for the experience. Readers with nothing better to do will recall Freelancer was named as PC PowerPlay's Best of E3 in 1999. Back then it was touted as a freeform, multi-layered experience - in a nutshell, the spiritual successor to Privateer and Elite. There was even talk of a persistent online world to follow after the game's release. Things have changed since...**

Gone is the persistent online world, and diluted is the freeform structure. Yet still it managed to strike awe into the hearts of even the hardest-bitten journos. This year, Freelancer strutted in like the most stylish sim in the universe, all metallic sheen and dreamy nebula effects. Original designer Chris Roberts wasn't there to spruik its merits, but it hardly mattered. Freelancer was once again too impressive to overlook.

Immediately evident is the incredible sense of scale. Of course it helps when you're witnessing the game on a twenty foot cinema screen in a darkened theatre, but it still managed to be breathtaking on the 21" monitors on the showfloor. Staggeringly vast capital ships - some several miles long - engulf the screen, while dozens of dogfighting mercenary craft turn the heavens into a latticework of laser fire: this is Freelancer. It's back on track after the Digital Anvil buy-out, and it's in better shape than ever.

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## SIMSVILLE

Simsville has progressed considerably since its debut at last year's show, meaning it should make its now realistic ship date of early next year. The town Maxis was demonstrating looked busy with plenty of Sims going about their daily business, though a few pink flamingos did little to enhance the seedy neighbourhood we witnessed. The Sims franchise appears no closer to ending.

## SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2

Is the per-pixel locational damage enabled by Raven's Ghoul II technology really the future of gaming? If being able to precisely knee-cap an enemy is the whole point, then Soldier of Fortune 2 is the ultimate game. The more squeamish will still find time to absorb the immersive environments and enjoy the latent stealth focus of this new-born tactical shooter.
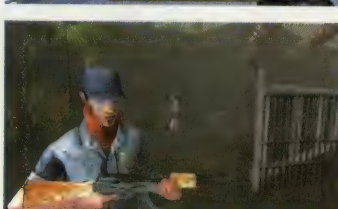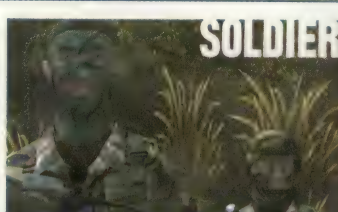
## LOOSE CANNON

**DEVELOPER**
Sinistar Games

**PUBLISHER**
Ubisoft

**AVAILABLE**
1st Qtr 2002

**URL**
www.sinistergames.com
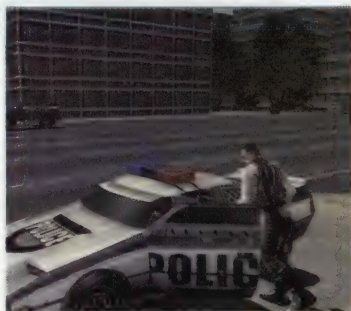
Like Conquest: Frontier Wars, Loose Cannon has been picked up by Ubisoft after being dumped by Microsoft late last year. Development duties have been passed to Sinister Games, a team whose track record (Dukes of Hazzard, anyone?) might sound alarm. The mix of driving and firstperson action looks promising on paper, but what we saw needs a radical overhaul to be roadworthy.
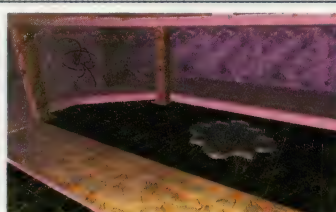


## EARTH & BEYOND

**DEVELOPER**
Westwood

**PUBLISHER**
Electronic Arts

**AVAILABLE**
4th Qtr

**URL**
www.westwood.com
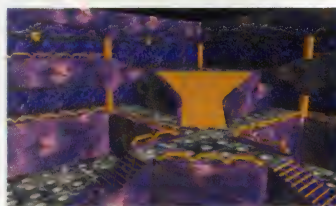
Shaping up as the game Freelancer was once destined to be (though, admittedly, even in its downsized form it looks great), Earth & Beyond showed a side of Westwood many of us thought we'd never again. That is, a company prepared to take risks and not necessarily rely upon revisiting the same old ground ad nauseum. One of the most intriguing online worlds in development.



## MYTH III

**DEVELOPER**
Mumbo Jumbo

**PUBLISHER**
Gathering of Developers

**AVAILABLE**
4th Qtr

**URL**
www.mythwolfage.com

**The Myth franchise seemed in doubt following the apparent disintegration of Bungie, the once great UK developer. The rights to Myth III were acquired by Take Two and thus subsidiary G.O.D. will publish the new instalment. Or ancient instalment, as the case may be.**

The scene for Myth III is set 1000 years before Myth: The Fallen Lords. The hero is Connacht the Wolf, stranded amidst a chaos world of Myrkidias, Oghres and Trow, who must do battle with these opposing evil forces. The folklore of the first two games is laid bare as the stories of infamous figures such as Damas are told in Myth III.

Myth III promises an update of the strategy battle formula of Myth I & II, not a reworking. The major changes will occur in the visual and editing tool department. Everything in Myth III will be rendered in OpenGL 3D. Visual detail has been increased from previous instalments - zoom in to see swaying blades of grass and branches bending in the wind. The visuals promise an immediacy in game that, together with Myth style cutscenes, will communicate the epic narrative.

The Fear and Loathing editing tools have been combined into one tool set known as Vengeance. It pulls together many of the new and old editing tools, to create a complete instrument of level design and customisation. It will either ship with the game, or be available a short time after.

## ZAX

**DEVELOPER**
Reflexive Entertainment
**PUBLISHER**
JoWood Productions
**AVAILABLE**
3rd Qtr
**URL**
www.jowood.com



The Alien Hunter has crash landed on a strange planet and must destroy a demon. Fast action, puzzle oriented isometric adventure pits Zax against an alien world complete with treacherous fauna, terrible enemies and traps and pitfalls for the unwary.

# SIGMA

**B** arely two months earlier at Microsoft's Gamestock in March, Sigma still appeared like a great idea in search of a game. The theme was immaculate, but the sketchily detailed design meant it was too early to gauge its success. Not really helping matters was the rough and ready nature of the graphics engine and animation.

Needless to say, Sigma at E3 was an astounding surprise. The demo given us by Relic's Alex Garden proved that his bizarre animal-crossbreeding concept has legs beyond his crazed imagination - even if the front pair belong to a polar bear while the hind resembles a scorpion.

Sigma is a realtime strategy game, the like of which you're never seen before. It's a place where giraffes and hyenas mutate openly, a place where a skunkoceros is as common as

## Garden's bizarre crossbreeding concept has legs beyond his crazed imagination

a chamelefly, a place where the player is free to explore the limits of imagination.

Garden revealed the meaning behind the game's subtitle, The Adventures of Rex Chance. The stereotypical nutcase scientist, Chance is the inventor of the Sigma Device, a machine capable of hybridising animals thanks to the simple channelling of electricity. The player must battle across an archipelago, exploiting the power of the Sigma Device to defeat Chance at his own game.

Over forty creatures will feature in the final game, with a possible 30,000 combinations of hybrid beasts. These creatures form the basis of the player's army. To avoid overwhelming or confusing the player, at the start of each mission or multiplayer game you will have to choose an army of just ten creatures which you will be able to produce during play. Think of it as like selecting a deck in Magic: The Gathering. It also forces tactical decisions such as which creatures complement each other: for instance, you could choose strong airborne units, fast offensive units, defensive sea-bound units, or a nice balanced set of troops.

Relic has also made considerable progress on the graphical front. The unit animation looks close to final, while the bump-mapped terrain is a sight to behold. If they can do all this in just two months, we can't wait to see the finished game early next year.

## STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER

| DEVELOPER | |
|---|---|
| Totally Games | |

| PUBLISHER | |
|---|---|
| Activision | |

| AVAILABLE | |
|---|---|
| September | |

| URL | |
|---|---|
| www.bridgecommander.com | |

Take command of a Star Ship in the true Star Trek style. Direct ships to battle in 3D space with stunning visuals effects. Accurately replicated ships that require real strategy to direct effectively, lovingly detailed from Paramount Archives source materials.

## NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

| DEVELOPER | |
|---|---|
| Bioware | |

| PUBLISHER | |
|---|---|
| Interplay | |

| AVAILABLE | |
|---|---|
| November | |

| URL | |
|---|---|
| www.neverwinternights.com | |

Official 3rd Edition Dungeons & Dragons RPG taking it back to where it began. The Neverwinter toolset allows a Dungeon Master to take control of the action for a party of other players over LAN or internet. The singleplayer game is equally impressive though, making NWN one of the most ambitious and complete roleplaying experience for PC ever.

## MAFIA: THE CITY OF LOST HEAVEN

| DEVELOPER | |
|---|---|
| Take 2 | |

| PUBLISHER | |
|---|---|
| Illusion Softworks | |

| AVAILABLE | |
|---|---|
| 4th Qtr | |

| URL | |
|---|---|
| www.mafia-game.com | |

In the gritty style of the Godfather, this mission-based 3D action game chronicles the life of a cab driver, Tommy, who turns into a major mob figure. Set in the 1930s, Mafia features enormous historic detail, with a huge city, much like New York, as the play area. An intense story threads the missions as Tommy comes to realise who to trust... and who to betray.

# Games Cafes

LAN CAFES ARE SPRINGING UP ALL OVER THE COUNTRY WITH PLAYERS DRAWN BY LOW-COST ONLINE ACTION. **DANIEL STAINES** PAYS A VISIT TO THE PLACE WHERE YOU CAN SEE THE WHITE OF YOUR ENEMY'S EYES...

M eet Timmy. Timmy is a boy of 12. Timmy likes to play computer games, socialise and, like any good 12 year old in the year 2005, is currently plotting to shoot several of his friends with automatic weaponry. Timmy plays hockey and, thanks to the poor aim of his teammates, has extremely sore shins. As such, Timmy is tired of hockey - he wants to stay home and play computer games. Timmy's parents, however, digress. They want their son to socialise with friends, but it's becoming increasingly obvious that if Timmy is forced to play more hockey, there's going to be unpleasantness - violent unpleasantness. So, being the forward thinking urban go-getter that he is, the father of Timmy, Jimmy, decides to enrol his son in one of those new 'gaming leagues' that he's heard so much about. These leagues, he later enthuses to both Timmy and Timmy's nonplussed mother, are held in cyber cafes where boys and girls like Timmy can go to play computer games, except - and here's the good part - as a team! As in together! In a social context! So not only will Timmy get to do what he likes, but also, he'll be doing it socially and might even make some real life friends! This, Jimmy concludes authoritatively, is the Saturday morning sport of the future.

He may not be too far from the truth, either. Fuelled by the ambitions of several cyber entrepreneurs, multiplayer gaming is being pushed through a conduit of social interaction into a whole new world of recreational evolution; and it can all largely

with the almost unbridled success of cafe gaming in Korea - where there is approximately one cafe for every 10 feet of land - the expressly finite services offered by a number of these establishments grew to cater for more than just backpacker greenbacks. For instance, **Andrew Chen**, manager of the Spaceway Internet Cafe in Sydney, explains that in the beginning, gaming was not the main focus of his

> ## a whole different bag to simply interacting with an erratically capitalised name on a screen

be attributed to one thing - the cyber cafe. The Saturday morning leagues alluded to above may not exist yet, but cafe gaming is certainly on the verge of creating them - with regular competitions, tournaments and, in some cases, prize money being offered on a regular basis. In case you're not in the know, the cyber cafe (or CC) is a relatively new concept that probably began its life in Australia as the now ubiquitous inner city email spot for backpacking tourists wanting to contact distant relatives while taking in a bowl of noodles or a cup of tea. However,

business and was tried mainly as an experiment to bring in extra revenue. Now, however, it is the cafe's main source of income and the trend has caught on. Indeed, as Andrew attests: "There were only two cafes in Sydney two years ago - now there are more than ten."

In fact, if one were to take Sydney as an indicator for the rest of the country, then it is increasingly obvious that cafe gaming is taking off in no small way. One simply can not wander into a cyber cafe and not see any gamers. Why are these establishments so
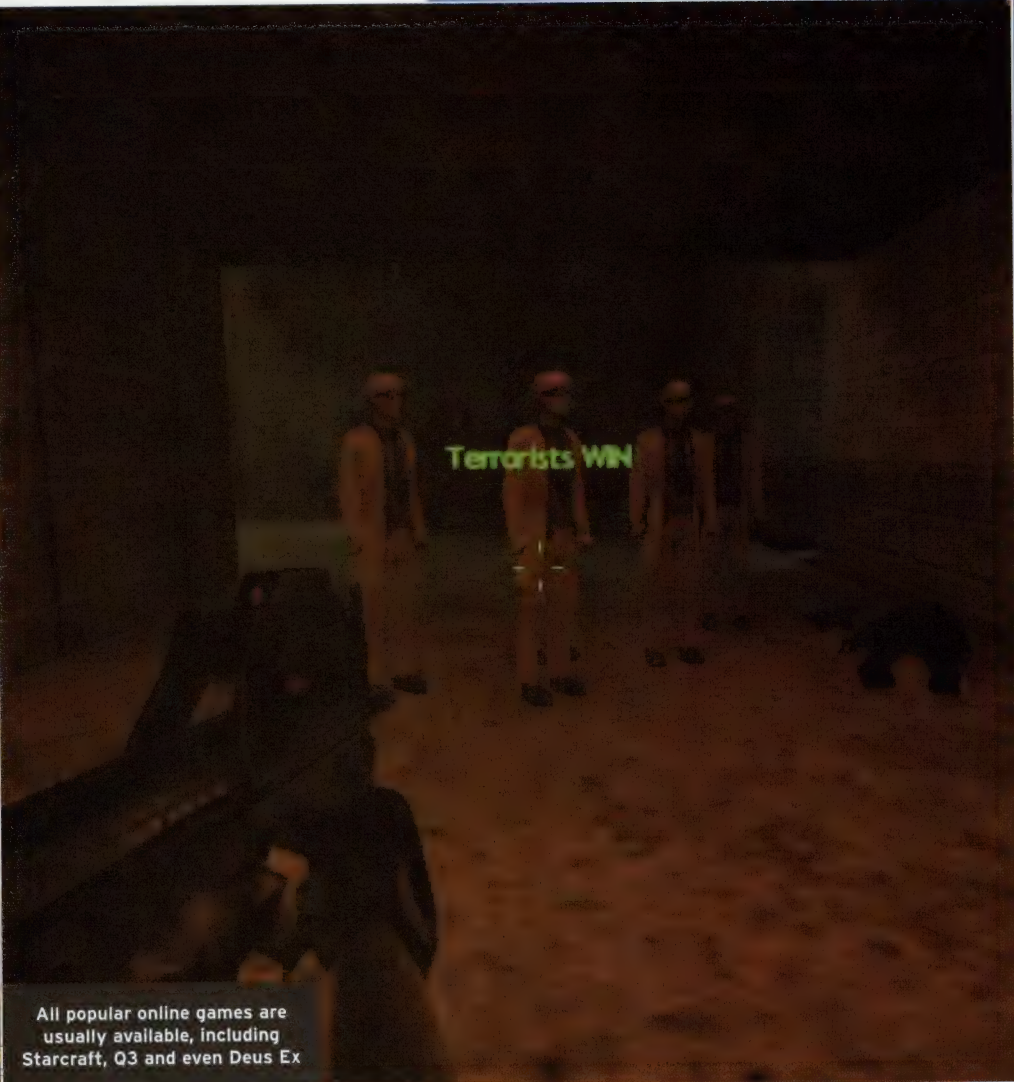
All popular online games are usually available, including Starcraft, Q3 and even Deus Ex

popular? Why would members of a sub culture typically stigmatised as being individualist and anti-social abandon their prized setups and cable connections to come play Quake 3 in a crowded city cafe on a muggy Saturday afternoon? Well, according to **Shane Issacs** and **Peter Koo** of iStarzone, one of Sydney's premier gaming cafes, it's for a variety of reasons:

"The reasons for playing in a cafe are varied. First off, there's lag - you receive much better pings at a well maintained LAN in a cafe than on the internet. Secondly, cafe gaming eliminates the use of cheats and hacks which seem to be so popular these days. Lastly, and probably most importantly, there is also the social advantage of meeting the people you are playing against and forming a local gaming community. I think for gaming to get to the level we are aiming for - which, I might as well say, is pretty high- then these social standards are very

important."

Exactly why 'social standards' are important for the proliferation of next level gaming as Issacs and Koo envisage it is obvious. Real life, face-to-face contact is - as anyone who's ever met a net-friend can testify - a whole different bag to simply interacting with an erratically capitalised name on a screen. **Tayon**, owner and founder of netGamer (yes, big 'g' little 'n'), a popular multiplayer den in the Sydney suburb of Glebe, succinctly sums up this higher level of player interaction with netGamer's impressive, if slightly bizarre, slogan: "netGamer - Hear 'em Scream." Sure, it's not exactly the nicest slogan in town, but it's one entirely suited for the cafe gaming scene. Outside of the often esoteric and elitist LAN party, a gaming cafe is the only place where gamers can go and actually hear the screams of defeated enemies or, conversely, the shouts of elated victory from a teammate. It is this environment of real life action that promotes an utterly unique sense of cammanderie within a gaming cafe or, as **Shur**, AKA Sexlurker *(Where do you find these guys? - Ed)*, would prefer to put it - "It's not just you against the world anymore - it's you and your team against the world."

Sexlurker, despite his criminally ominous

## THE WCGC


WORLD CYBER GAMES

The World Cyber Games Challenge - or WCGC as it's better known - is one of the world's biggest multiplayer events, attracting hundreds of gamers worldwide with a prize pool of over $200,000. And guess what? Good ol' Australia is hosting a leg of it - and it's being held right here in Sydney's iStarzone. Having written the rules for this years Counter Strike tournament, the boys at iStarzone can expect to be playing host to some of the best Counter-Strike and Starcraft gamers in this country and will be sending the winners off to Korea to play in the finals. Think you've got what it takes? Well, come September you'll be able to prove it. Just make sure you give iStarzone a call and register first.

# The Big 3

Though there are dozens of cyber cafes in the Sydney CBD area, a majority of them are pure email/Internet providers. A few do, however, cater for gamers almost exclusively - of these, the following are the best we found. Don't bother with the rest - these are the picks for the serious Sydney gamer:

**iStarzone**
Address:  Lvl B1 & B2 George Street Sydney 2000 (near Central) and
127A Liverpool Street Sydney 2000 (next to The Shark Hotel)
Phone: (02) 9280 3088
Rates: $3.00 hr with free membership at George St and $3.50 at Liverpool St
URL: www.istarzone.net
Standard Machine: PIII 600, 128 MB RAM, GeForce/TNT2, 17" Samsung Monitor
Number of Machines: Between the 2 city stores,80
Network Speed: Good
Other Info: A must see weekly CS comp ran every Sunday at 2-3 PM. $250+ goes to the winning CS Clan

**PCPP RATING: 92%**

**netGamer:**
Address: 26 Glebe Pt Rd, Glebe
Phone:
Rates: Non-Member: $3.40 hr Member: $3.00 hr
URL: www.netgamer.net.au
Standard Machine: PIII 500-600, 128 MB RAM, GeForce2 MX, 19" Monitors, SB Live! and plushy seats!
Number of Machines: 20
Network Speed: Excellent
Other Info: Runs sporadic comps and LAN events - contact store for more details

**PCPP RATING: 89%**

**Spaceway Cafe:**
Address: 694 George St, Sydney 2000
Phone: (02) 9211 8663
Rates: From 12-8:30 PM: $3.30 hr 8:30PM-12PM:2.50 hr
URL: N/A
Standard Machine: Celeron/PIII 500, 128 MB RAM, 15-17" monitors, TNT2 Ultra 32 Mb
Number of Machines: 50
Network Speed: Average
Other Info: The only place in town to run Deus Ex multiplayer! Pity no one was playing it...

**PCPP RATING: 77%**

moniker, is a man to be trusted on this - after all, he's been gaming for a good 20 years now and is a prominent fixture in the quickly expanding structure of Sydney's cafe gaming elite.  When asked why it is he frequents the gaming cafes instead of just getting a cable connection or going to LAN parties, his response was direct and to the point. "I've always liked playing with friends. You work together as a team, you play as a team and, here, you win or lose as a team - together. And with LAN parties, you know, it's very inconvenient and hard to set up. Here, you can just walk in and play."

Just walk in and play - if there was ever a cyber cafe ethos, than that would be it. No

Unsurprisingly, Counter-Strike is the number one game in most cyber cafes

## The Three Golden Rules

From our cyber cafe experiences, we've found that, like everything else in the known universe, there are three golden rules to be followed when partaking in a bit of cafe gaming. These are:

**1**



Always check the name you've got before play begins. Look, it might seem a little silly, but there's nothing more embarassing than finding out the reason people are constantly saying 'she's ugly anyway' to you is because you failed notice that your screen name was 'IAmScrEwingYourSister-HA!'. We know this from experience, trust us.

**2**



Don't yell out abusive insults at people who've just fragged you. It may take a while to realise it, but you're not at home any more, tiger. As such, when you scream out that FrAg-eAta is nothing more than a 'worthless, camping shithead', he's probably going to hear it and, if you're particularly unlucky, might be bigger than you are. So, unless you lay no particular value on your as-of-yet unbroken jaw, refrain from the abuse and take it like a gentleman.

**3**
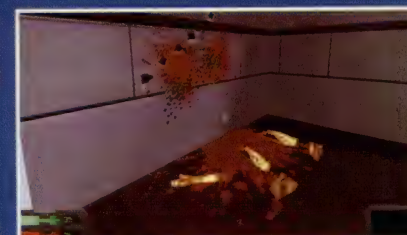


Have fun. A Saturday afternoon at the local gaming cafe isn't a matter of life or death, sport - there's no need to take it seriously. Just sit back, grab yourself a bowl of noodles and chill, 'cause that's what it's all about.

PC lugging, no network setup, no hassles. Well, no hassles unless you want to play Quake or Unreal Tournament. If you're thinking of cafe gaming, then don't bother perfecting your railgun technique, tiger - because Counter-Strike is the game of the moment. Cafes do offer a good variety of games to play, mind you, it's just that nobody wants to play them. And why should they? The fluid team mechanics and tense atmosphere of the omnipresent mod suit the cafe environment perfectly. In fact, Counter-Strike's popularity in the cafes is one that Andrew Chen believes to be self-perpetuating. "When all your friends are playing, you don't have a choice. You either join up with them or be left alone".

One might say, considering this, that cafe gaming is heading down a path of elitist stagnation and inevitable decline, but Tayon certainly doesn't think so.

"Counter-Strike is like soccer," he explains, "and soccer players don't get sick of playing soccer. It's what they do and it'll always be around - but that doesn't mean other people can't play other stuff."

And so, with these unlikely similarities between soccer and Counter-Strike arising, we come once again to the hypothetical situation posed in the first paragraph of this article. Will cafe gaming evolve into Jimmy's 'Saturday morning sport of the future'? The answer to that is a very optimistic 'maybe'.

Multiplayer undoubtedly represents a necessary social evolution for gaming, and the cyber cafe, it is arguable, is an important step in that evolution. Where this evolution will lead is debatable, but one thing is for certain: if cafe gaming keeps evolving to the extent that is now, we can quite reasonably expect that Timmy's fictitious Saturday morning Counter-Strike league will become more than just a mere hypothetical.

# IN REVIEW

The most authoritative reviews around

# GAMES

**E**xperience tells me anticipation is a mistake. Excitement is the calm before the let down storm. To quote my self-help guru, "Expectation breeds disappointment". So he was beside himself when I declared, "I am excited!"

You see, I'm excited. Not in a private-school-woodwork-class kind of way, more in a Hills-are-alive-with-the-sound-of-music way. E3 does this to me: the promise of a gaming future of which I had been blissfully unaware. The Wolfensteins, the Sigmas, the Republics - lo! They have parted the clouds, thin though they might have been. My very personal affection is well and truly waxing, waxing so that even old games have been reignited through me.

News of Jedi Outcast alone was enough to reconvert this games apostle to LucasArts. Dammit, I'm ready to be burned again. My nightly prayers include an extra decade that Kyle Katarn will return as brilliant as ever (well, religion's been used for worse, hasn't it?). I know it's true - I can feel the fire of games love in my belly.

And hey, rubberneck, why be cynical? For every Outlive there's a Space Tripper. PCPP analysts estimate the percentage of good gaming on the market hasn't changed in the past ten years (steady at 15%) but the number of quality titles certainly has, thanks to our booming industry. We're more blessed than ever before.

Sure, consoles loom as some sort of grey menace, Federal elections are around the corner and Insurance Companies collapse as I write but hey, look on the bright side. Your passion for fun hasn't died yet, you can read... you have PC PowerPlay, don't you? Like that old crim at the end of the Shawkshank Redemption, let us whisper softly, "I hope...I hope".

Go in peace.

johnd@next.com.au

## THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

| 90+ | Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game. |
| 89-80 | A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field. |
| 79-60 | Competent and playable. For fans of the genre. |
| 59-40 | Decidedly average, probably boring. |
| 39-0 | A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid. |
| | |
| Need | The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed. |
| Want | The ideal system requirements for the game. |
| For | The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game. |
| Against | The major reasons why you won't. |

# EMPEROR
# BATTLE FOR DUNE

## Westwood's answer to a game we've already played... twice

Mac OSX meets the charge of the Light Brigade

**W**estwood is clearly keen to dispel the stigma of a 'when it's done' developer by releasing its second RTS title in six months. After the extensive delays resulting the lacklustre Tiberian Sun, it's good to see the father of the modern RTS back on the rails... that is, assuming the developer is in fact back on the rails and not just cashing in.

Emperor: Battle For Dune is yet another remake of the RTS that started it all. Dune 2 introduced gamers to an expansive desert battlefield filled with a variety of different

> spice may be the  most valuable resource in the universe, but on Dune it's good for one thing only: building tanks

machines of war, all in pursuit of the most valuable resource in the universe: *melange*, or spice, if you prefer. Then, a couple of years ago we were presented with Dune 2000, an update of Dune 2 which used the Red Alert engine and dramatically increased the pace of the game, while adding a few new units

to the well worn armies of Dune 2.

Emperor is a return to Arrakis, a big-budget extravagance spanning four CDs with hours of substandard actors prancing around in sumptuous costumes in front of lavish computer-generated backdrops that have been shamelessly ripped off (or perhaps officially licensed) from David Lynch's 1984 film. Emperor is not, however, a new gaming experience, but rather a tweaked reiteration of an old one.

The game is best thought of as a graphical update and expansion pack for Dune 2000. The sprites of old have been replaced by an attractive 3D engine that runs very swiftly on a decent machine (Duron 700 with 128Mb RAM and a GeForce2 MX) but chugs somewhat on more modest PCs. Also, load times are extreme, with waits of up to a minute when simply reloading a game.

Utilising a three-race conflict model, the

armies of the Harkonnen, Atreides and the non-canonical Ordos have been completely redesigned - at least cosmetically. Each House now has a much stronger sense of visual identity, although the traditional gameplay model doesn't translate this identity into different gameplay styles.

### We have just folded space from Ix

The premise of the game is flimsy as always; after all, we're fighting for a planet-wide desert full of giant tank-eating worms and crazed nomadic natives. Dispensing easily with actual events in Frank Herbert's Dune universe, the game opens with the Emperor Shaddam IV of House Corrino slain by his concubine. Rather than have his son succeed the throne, the Bene Gesserit sisterhood allows Corrino's claim to the Lion Throne to lapse, and so the other Houses in the galactic council known as the Lansraad are free to fight for the succession.

A convenient plot device sees only House Harkonnen, House Atreides and House Ordos positioned to realistically fight for domination.

Battles take place at different times of day; here, the purple sands of sunset

The Spacing Guild - which is the only faction with access to intergalactic space travel - permits the three Houses to fight a limited 'war of assassins' on Arrakis, and only on Arrakis. Invoking the terms of the mythical Great Convention, the Guild forbids use of Atomics, and forbids the war from being fought on any other worlds but Dune. However it's not long before these rules are broken. And so the stage is set.

What Emperor brings to the tried and tested Dune 2 formula - beyond the 3D engine - is a diplomatic balancing act the player must engage in between five different 'minor' factions. Each of these factions - the Imperial Sardaukar, the native Fremen, the machinist Ix, the biotech Tlielaxu and the Spacing Guild itself - grant the player two special units which in theory add flavour to the tactical mix.

### Many machines on Ix

Their value is theoretical because Emperor is not a particularly deep or tactical game. Like all Westwood titles since Dune 2, the focus in Emperor is on fast, furious RTS combat with lots of flying debris and impressive explosions. Enemy squads swarm like ants across the dunes and throw

themselves Kamikaze-style at base defences. Retreat is clearly for the weak. Reinforcements are clearly somebody else's problem. Spice may be the most valuable resource in the universe, but on Dune it's good for one thing and one thing only: building tanks.

To win a battle in Emperor, a simple formula needs to be followed. Establish a base. Establish a steady flow of spice. Build a few base defences to counter early attacks. Build twenty or thirty tanks. Drive them to your opponent's base. Smash everything. Win.

Emperor offers more units per House than either Dune 2 or Dune 2000 but at least half of these units are wasted because tank rushing is so effective, any other tactics are a waste of both time and money.

Also, even though each House has a markedly different array of weaponry, a little closer examination reveals that even though these units all look very different, each House still has a basic infantry unit, an advanced infantry unit, a basic tank, an advanced tank, a flying unit, a handful of special units and finally an extremely large and expensive advanced tank that can only be built using a House Palace.

One point of interest is that the cloaked scouting unit is now readily available and the cheapest of infantry units, which really opens up the playfield and puts the emphasis on extreme destruction and furious combat, rather than exploration.

### You must face my Gom Jabbar!

Fortunately, the effectiveness of special weapons has been limited following - we hope - feedback from fans of Red Alert 2. In Emperor, each house has exactly the same type of special weapon; an enormous strike-of-massive-power-from-the-heavens.

However, these weapons take slightly different functional forms; the Ordos Chaos Lightning looks rather different to the Harkonnen Deathhand missile, and causes units to attack each other in a blind rage, while the Atreides Hawk Strike simply frightens enemy units

Sandworms are now more deadly, but units are cheaper, so who cares



## LOOKS GOOD WITH A HEAD WIND

Emperor is, for the most part, graphically very impressive. Westwood has clearly spent most of Emperor's development cycle honing and re-honing the graphics engine, to maximise speed and good looks. Unfortunately though, careless use of the zoom function can result in some less than impressive visuals, as these two screenshots show. At the tightest level of zoom, objects seem stretched and flattened, and the problem of distinguishing different unit types becomes even more difficult.





off the map.

However, as mentioned above, it's rarely necessary to use this special weapon in singleplayer games, since tanks are much cheaper to build and more effective when deployed in large numbers.

Westwood has done a lot to make a desolate wasteland seem more vibrant and alive. This is a planet with a 5,000 year history of human colonisation after all. The

> Giedi Prime and Draconis IV look very effective, but Caladan in many ways resembles an enormous billiard table

sands of Dune are now liberally dotted with the rusted hulks of previous battles, and the numerous rocky platforms are home to civilian villages of adobe and also Fremen encampments under canvas.

The 3D engine is quite detailed and able to render such tiny objects as discarded tyres

and washing on lines as well as domestic pack animals which look suspiciously like Bantha from the Star Wars universe.

And of course the sandworms are now very impressive; enormous creatures that tower above all other vehicles on the battlefield. However, because the pace of the game is so much faster and vehicles are built so much more quickly, the worms are less of an immediate concern than they were in the original Dune 2. In order to counter this, the worms are quite capable of swallowing entire infantry squads and several vehicles in one enormous gulp.

### The Bene Gesserit witch must leave

Westwood has made a cursory attempt to add a tiny amount of strategic play to the pre-mission screens in the singleplayer campaigns. The planet is split evenly between the three Houses and like in Dune 2 and Dune 2000 the player must select the next territory to attack.

However, there is now an extra strategic

screen that allows the player to choose which territory to attack from. Once the choice has been made, a mission briefing appears, and displays a difficulty percentage as well as reinforcement ratings for each of the combatants.

Unfortunately it was hard to see exactly what these reinforcement ratings meant. Presumably the rating reflects the frequency that the player receives reinforcing units, but whether a higher number is better (ie more units) or a lower number is better (ie less time) was hard to determine.

Also, every three missions or so, the enemy 'strikes back' and the player can chose to defend or resign a territory that is being threatened. Since there's no overall pool of resources or units, it's difficult to see what advantage could be gained from resigning a territory.

Emperor also breaks with the Dune 2 tradition by offering other tilesets for play. Missions take place not only on Arrakis, but also on Giedi Prime (techno), Draconis IV (ice)
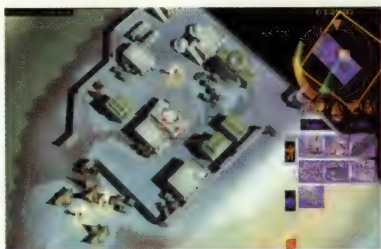
A spectacular superweapon inflicts bugger all damage

and Caladan (temperate). Giedi Prime and Draconis IV look very effective with lava pits and ice storms respectively, but Caladan is rather unimpressive, resembling in many ways an enormous billiard table. Still, the variety is refreshing.

### The spice must flow!

The new engine is not all immersive environments and crazy weather effects, however. The nature of the 3D graphics, especially when model detail is switched to low to speed up battles, makes it very difficult to differentiate between different buildings and even different units.

Also, in the thick of very large battles between more than thirty units, it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish the enemy from friendly vehicles, making the use of number-assigned squads mandatory.

Finally, the sexy new transparent interface makes the playfield seem much bigger but does create problems of its own. Since every part of the interface is surrounded by transparency, attempting to direct units on the minimap can often have them walking to a position just beneath where the transparent map is floating.

Just missing the build buttons can also result in units going where they shouldn't, so extra care is needed even in the midst of a mouse-clicking frenzy.

Despite all of Emperor's very fine improvements and enhancements over the traditional Dune 2 formula, at its heart this is still the same game. The resource model is the same, the build order is the same, the objectives are the same and the overall feel and atmosphere of the game is the same.

If you've missed out on either of the first two Westwood Dune games, or if too much Dune is barely enough, then Emperor is a worthy title. It's a strong, quick attractive RTS with a cheesy but well-implemented plot, and while it takes many liberties with Frank Herbert's universe, it does capture the unique feel of both the Dune novels and David Lynch's crazed film.

However, if you're even the slightest bit tired of the well-worn RTS formula that we've seen on Dune alone twice before - not to mention the four C&C games - then Emperor is unlikely to impress. It's well done, but it's nothing new.

**Anthony Fordham**

## PCPP

**FOR**
■ Tried'n'tested
■ Fast'n'furious
■ Pretty

**AGAINST**
■ Seen it
■ Played it
■ Slow loads

**OVERALL**
*If only all cash-ins were this good*

# 79%

# I-WAR 2
# EDGE OF CHAOS

A space-sim for Real Men (and Real Women too, of course)

Indian Curry Drive at full power!

Independence War, huh? What, a bunch of guys in space ships painting their faces and shouting, "they can take our life but they can't take our freedom"? Well, yes and no. The first game put you in command of about 19,000 tons of corvette-class spaceship, battling on the side of the establishment to fend off the 'Indies' and their nasty uprising. The expansion flipped things around and put you in

## Grandma was a pirate who as Jafs puts it, "preferred blast shielding to picket fences"

command of a stolen corvette newly plastered with rebel, hippy, markings and sticking it to da man.

This title is the true sequel to the game that brought the hard science of inertia, angular momentum and rotation to spaceship fighting games and is set a hundred years after the civil war of the first game. No longer is the central character an established Captain. This time around he's a

guy out for revenge against the man who killed his father and sent him up the river at the age of 12. When he breaks out of the big house with some of the most skilled, and somehow still noble, space scum the frontier has produced, you can just tell things are going to get interesting.

The merry, rag-tag band heads off to our hero Cal's late grandmother's house. This isn't as quaint as it sounds; Grandma was a pirate who as Jafs puts it, "preferred blast shielding to picket fences". From this hidden base Cal and his buddies can engage in piracy, freedom fighting and getting drawn into what may be the next Independence War.

### Sailing the Space Ways

When Cal and his friends high-tailed it from the prison station there didn't happened to be a big-old corvette hanging around for them to commandeer. Instead they took an engine with a small crew

compartment and some guns, a.k.a. a space tug. Using primarily a retrofitted tug, or later, an advanced heavy interceptor, is very different to flying a big naval vessel.

Moving between the different locations on the bridge is gone; instead you can pull up all of your navigation, weapon, engineering and communications options from the single pilot seat with a push of your joystick's hat or the cursor buttons. Although the hat trick is neat - letting you issue almost every game command with just your thumb - the keyboard is best for most quick operations. It's just faster in the end. The hat would probably have been better used for switching opponents or autopilot modes, but this is more an observation than a complaint.

The complaints come when you want to set things up to suit your game peripherals and preferences. The keys are set like an old Liberal. You use what they give you. There are only two set-ups: default and keyboard-only. Default assumes you have a joystick (with eight buttons, a hat, and which twists). For more modest sticks there are some back-up

You all have filthy minds

WARNING: MISSIL[...]ETECTED

button combinations to use, but they tend to be a bit awkward. Forget flying with the mouse or inverting the controls; forward dips the nose and if your brain can't deal with aircraft controls, bad luck.

If you can deal with the standardised controls, flying is otherwise a joy. The physics system takes some time to get used to, as it's not just an airplane fighter game set against the stars but more of a loose space sim. When you turn your little ship around you will often find yourself continuing your previous flight path, away from where you are facing, until the thrusters overcome momentum.

With flight assist on, the lateral thrusters will compensate for side-to-side motion and make your spaceship handle more like a fighter plane; with the assist turned off, thrusters will add to all the other times you have used them producing motion in whatever net direction that might turn out to be. This is actually very handy when you zoom towards someone in a dogfight. You can switch off flight assist and flip your ship over, without changing direction and keep

firing at your target as it passes, until it zips out of range. Try that in a fighter jet and you'll just rip your wings off.

Sometimes 3D space can be tricky - just ask the Yanks who had to moonlight as a valet service at Mir a couple of years ago - so there are autopilot routines that handle routine procedures, like docking, staying in formation and locking onto and heading to a waypoint - which are all really handy when used properly.

A downside to all of this 3D space, which the autopilots can't eradicate completely, is that you will spend a lot of time waiting for your ship to travel the great distances between encounter areas even with the LDS drive (warp drives) and jump engines (which require you to go to a Lagrange point before using). Each trip between locations like between your base (the only save point) and anywhere, can take half a minute or more - during which you get to watch space flow by and, I guess, dream lazily of revenge. Being able to just skip to each destination, or at least until something showed up, would be nice.

### Is All Freedom an Illusion?

Many people felt railroaded as a Naval Captain taking orders in the first game, so this time around the good people at Particle Systems decided to loosen the reigns a little. Hence, Cal and his buddies are pirates and have at their disposal this huge base with manufacturing capabilities.

At any stage you can decide that you don't want to follow the beaten path and that you'd rather terrorise the spaceways. A few good shots will usually convince

### NICE ASSIST

Space is big, really big. And to move around in space you have to move fast, really fast. This makes doing things like shooting a small ship in big space pretty tricky. This game swings from easy to hit things to needing the force depending whether you take the assistance or not. Hardcore gamers should just accept the help, as no one in their right minds would strap into a spaceship without a computer fire control.

Good Lord I can see their privates!

WARNING MISSILE LAUNCH DETECTED
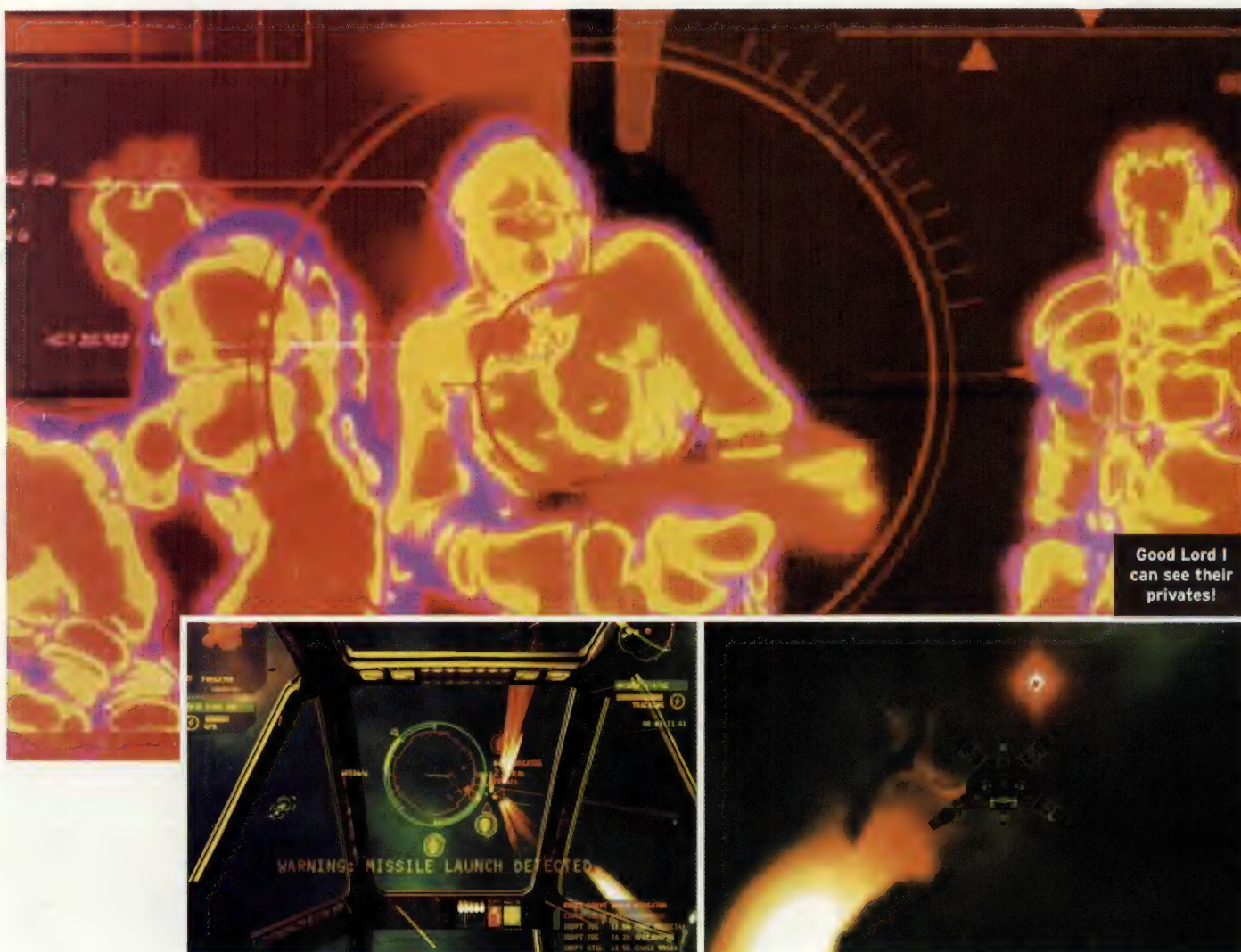
Captains to surrender their loads. Of course there is usually the matter of escorts and the law, but that just adds to the experience really.

This bounty can then be boasted about and swum in Scrooge McDuck-style or, in game terms, traded or recycled. Trade allows the player to access new hardware and software. Get your butt kicked on a mission and you can leave it a while, returning when you have boosted enough gear to upgrade a little. You can also trade for blueprints of items and then crank them out using your manufacturing facilities. It's all pretty cool and every area of the craft has multiple upgrades available

for players with great patience and a real pirate bent.

All of this is just decoration on the cake, though. I-War 2 isn't really all that freeform: this is not Beyond the Frontier, but Edge of Chaos. All of your trading options seem to come in via email shopping on the web at the base. You don't find the game generating subplots off the beaten track (or at least, I didn't). You don't travel station-to-station finding unique characters and trade goods (except as a part of the game's mission structure).

In fact, usually when a mission pops up you'll find you're ready to handle it, and if you're having a really tough time it's

probably because you haven't worked out the trick to the mission.

### Rules are Made to be Followed

The space-combat oriented puzzles are back. They are actually kind of engaging and fairly imaginative, from having to use stealth to graffiti a high-profile flagship to having to pick up warheads in your cargo bay to destroy a station. The downside to these puzzles is that there is only one way to complete some of them. The worst offender was a mission where you are meant to use stealth and a remote drone to pick up a crate full of mega-expensive goodies. I didn't realise you had to do it their way so I tried the direct approach. I ran the gauntlet, dodging huge amounts of fire (a little skill, a lot of luck), and then managed to dock with the crate (agonisingly slowly as I needed the autopilot dock routine) somehow still without dying, and then finally I blasted my way out of there, and found that just as I was escaping I blew up for no good reason - except I hadn't solved the problem in the right way. Punishing gamers for pulling something off against the odds is just wrong.

The other thing that puts a crimp in this

### OPTIONS THROUGH ARMS

The real options of the game come in how you'll tackle the mission and take out the bad guys. There is a huge range of upgrades on the market, not to mention several ships to pilot.
Imaging modules let you target specific locations on a ship with pinpoint accuracy, like a sniper scope. Pursuit software lets your computer stick you to an enemy's tail like hot glue, stealth modules hide your electromagnetic signature, aggression shields enable ramming speed and cooling pods let you blaze up with all of your excessive weapon payload without overheating.
This is just the tip of the iceberg. Fear not, Edge of Chaos comes with optional extras.

Subtle displays warn the player of hazards

WARNING: MISSILE LAUNCH DETECTED

SHIELD STAT
TRACKIN

00:0

idea of freedom is that you tend to get the best stuff from completing the missions anyway, which is no surprise, really.

Luckily, the missions are all pretty well designed (once you get a feel for which puzzle elements need to be done a certain way and which can be fudged) and they keep you guessing with subtle misdirection and different combat situations.

Although you'll get the chance to head up quite large fleets, with many a wingperson to boss about, you are limited tactically by having to issue the same order across your entire command: you can't have half the ships defend your target while using the other half in a sweeping offensive. Then again, the extra ships are just for grand scale; this game is more about one-on-one heroics.

## Dog Fight Dog World

If you are looking for the next Elite or Privateer then this isn't your game. It is open ended, to a degree, but this isn't a trading or manufacturing game. It isn't a fleet strategy game, either.

If you are looking for a game that picks up the ball where Independence War left off, with science fiction physics leaning towards the science and combat with the

feel it is across the vast emptiness of space then you have come to the right place. Edge of Chaos offers the elements that made the I-War games fun but has made the ships (you now have a choice) a little more nimble and added a host of options for decking them out.

The real essence of the game is the mission-based combat, slowly mastering the controls and customising your ship with captured, traded and awarded new technology and fantastic upgrades. The story clicks along nicely and the voice acting and FMV sequences between acts are all atmospheric and hip sci-fi fare. The game, overall, features solid pacing, with tech and new challenges coming when they're needed to keep things moving.

Edge of Chaos looks good, has a spread of missions and enough new toys and combat situations to keep the combat fresh. It is, overall, a great space combat game. If you can deal with the trinity of annoying features - namely waiting 30 seconds at a time for your ship to cross the vastness of space between key events, no in-mission saves and set keys - don't hesitate stepping up to the Edge of Chaos.

**Timothy C. Best**

## SPACE SCUM OF YOUR OWN

Your crew is made up of people your character spent his teens and young adult life with: space cons. There's the rough around the edges, but loyal, cyber-hacker Lemuel Smith. Jafs is your very own fence. He has all the contacts, but all the social skills you associate with space scum. Then there are your two dangerous combat pilots, Az and Lori. You play Cal Johnson. Since being institutionalised at the age of twelve, he has grown into a resourceful and charismatic leader, banding quarrelling inmates into a family fit for a breakout.



## PCPP

**FOR**
■ Great sci-fi physics
■ Tight flight control
■ Cool combat

**AGAINST**
■ Key controls locked
■ Inter-mission travel dull
■ No in-mission saves

**OVERALL**
*Colourful space combat game that feels like it's actually in space. Cool.*

# 85%

# DIABLO II LORD OF DESTRUCTION

## Evil returns in such a wonderful godly form...

We got both types of gameplay: hack AND slash

T he time has come to gather your resources and prepare once again for the onslaught against Diablo and his kin. Fear not the struggle. Rejoice in the knowledge that you are not alone and that others join you in the fight against the Lord of Destruction. The time is now at hand. Blizzard's forge has once again yielded an expansion set of considerable power and persuasion.

Diablo II has been on the shelves for some time and there is no doubt that its avid fans will now be itching to sink their teeth into its add-on pack, Lord of Destruction (LoD). LoD is the latest addition to Blizzard's family of quality expansion sets along with the likes of StarCraft: Brood War and WarCraft: Beyond the Dark Portal. Like these, LoD doesn't simply add to an already well-established game - it takes Diablo II gameplay to a whole new level.

The fifth Act is perhaps the biggest contribution LoD brings to the fray, which takes place after the infamous groovy movie sequence following the demise of Diablo. This time, however, your much-battered character must journey into the Barbarian Highlands to defeat Baal, the last of the Prime Evils, before he and his new minions

destroys the Worldstone and breaks down the barriers between the world of Sanctuary and Hell forever...

Thankfully, you are not alone in the highlands. Amidst the crags, snow and frozen rivers is Harrogath, a barbarian town held under siege by a horde of demons much tougher than those encountered previously. A few new creatures have also been added to the slaughter-list including the intelligent Overseers and a suite of siege machines. Barbarian and beast battle through the highlands but, despite their troubles, the local populace is not friendly. Your first quest will be to win the trust of their leader.

Gamers who have already finished Diablo II at least once will be pleased to know that their characters can be imported into the LoD game to continue their campaign against all that is unwholesome. Otherwise, you can begin a new game with another character, including the new assassin and the druid. Those who feel intimidated by such a thought should think again - each character class plays the game in different ways, rendering each scenario an entirely new experience.

### The Assassin

The assassin is a powerful character who looks absolutely stunning in her leather get-up and high boots. The assassins were originally trained to hunt down renegade magi and, as such, draw upon a balance of might and magic to complete their tasks. Natalya, from Act III, is a member of this sect. While the assassin does not sport magics as powerful as those of the sorceress, she can use barbarian-like combat skills to decimate tougher creatures like Duriel and Andariel at close quarters.

As assassins have a deep distrust of magic, they prefer to use items that duplicate the powers of other characters and creatures. As a result, the assassin employs traps to maim large enemy groups. One of the most powerful is the Fire Trap, which is set in place and activated once an aggressor approaches. Five waves of flames can be fired, killing most monsters in view. Other traps include grenades, electrical sentries

DARK RANGER
Demon

I'm your private dancer, dancer for money...

## SUBCLASSES



Strangely enough, the online community doesn't seem satisfied with the standard character class names. To further identify a character, some of the more keen Diablo people have introduced terms that indicate how a character is usually played. Some examples are: Missionary: a paladin that usually uses conversion as a principle means of attack;Bowazon: an amazon who uses a bow all the time instead of javelins and spears; Daggermancer: a necromancer who only uses poisoned daggers;Auradin: a paladin who doesn't use any abilities except those that benefit others, especially auras;Spearbarb: a barbarian with a fixation on spears. Zookeeper: a necromancer who relies on summoned creatures. The last of these, in light of the new druid class, may change in the future. Check out http://www.diab-loii.net/strategy/navd2guides.shtml for more details (who says that role-playing doesn't exist in Diablo!)

and spinning blades (the latter making any Xena fan proud!).

While the assassin's prowess with traps certainly makes her one of the easiest characters to progress through the game, her hand-to-hand capabilities can't be ignored. Her command of the martial arts allows her to use special manoeuveres to gain an advantage when it comes to the finishing move - these are especially powerful when combined with the new 'claw' class weapons. With the Tiger Claw, for example, she can store up to three consecutive hits to gain (at level 4) a 480% damage bonus to her chosen finishing move skill. While these combinations require a lot of hot key swapping practice at first, the effort certainly pays off - the writer's assassin character currently polishes most unique Act III characters off in a single melee combination! Thankfully, Blizzard has kindly provided eight extra hot key slots for use in LoD as well...

Although the above assassin skills are used the most during play, she can employ numerous Shadow Disciplines throughout the game. These skills allow the assassin to run faster, block attacks and, at higher levels,

summon her own shadow to help with the dirty work - definitely a boon at later stages of the game.

### The Druid

Like a vegetarian vigilante, the druid relies on the forces of nature to mete out his retribution to all the dark elements that threaten the world of Sanctuary. With capabilities very similar to the necromancer, the druid can summon a variety of woodlands creatures to aid him in his

## each character class plays the game in different ways, rendering each scenario an entirely new experience.

journey, including ravens, wolves, dire wolves, wood spirits and creeping vines. Of these, the vines are the most impressive - these creatures can be seen burrowing through the ground and poisoning unsuspecting enemies. During times of need, however, the druid can call upon the nature's dark and become either a werewolf or a werebear to gain a strength or speed advantage during combat. Of course, the

I feel like chicken tonight, chicken tonight...

## BATTLENET

At the time of writing, the beta test of the Diablo II expansion Battlenet server had been underway for about two weeks and some new multiplayer patches were already available. Despite the fact that the writer occupies the lower eschelons of Perth, WA and the server was located in California, there were no real problems with lag during a game. On occasion, however, the connection did drop out abruptly but reconnection was very quick and easy. Most of the time, it was possible to reconnect into the same game again ... a welcome relief during a hard online session.

observant role-player may recall a similar druid ability being used in Baldur's Gate...

The druid also has the ability to use the elemental forces of fire, ice and wind to combat Baal and his cronies. While Blizzard must have been tempted to replicate the standard fireball and ice wall fare, the developers have developed some interesting spectacles. As a consequence, the druid can conjure blizzards, a large ball of molten lava and volcanoes to smite those with little love for Gaia.

Despite his abilities, the druid is weaker than the assassin and, by all accounts, takes longer to get through all the quests. For visual splendour, however, the druid wins

hands down. Besides, who'd want to miss out on the tenpin bowling session with nine skeletal mages and one giant molten rock?

### Play balancing and improving

While the extra chapter and the new character classes are great additions to Diablo II, Blizzard have incorporated some other interesting features into LoD to make gameplay a little easier. One of the most welcome features is certainly the new 800 x 600 pixel display, which allows you to see more of the playing area at any given time. As a result, hunting for the dart-spitting Fetish is not quite as hard as it used to be.

To make monster hunting a lot easier,

mercenaries have been substantially upgraded in LoD. Instead of being weak little wimps, which were only used for cannon fodder, the new revised models showed a lot of muscle. Gamers can now access their follower's inventory to supply them with health potions, antidotes, weapons and armour, allowing you to easily upgrade their combat capabilities. They earn experience like normal characters but you sometimes get the feeling that they advance levels a little too quickly. Best of all, they can now be resurrected - weapons and all - should they fall during battle.

Blizzard has also made a few changes to the LoD inventory system, which seems to indicate a shift in the direction of gameplay. In both Diablo I and II, characters were forced to select particular weapon and armour styles with large magic bonuses, allowing very little individuality between online players. The writer, for example, had a particular fondness for the King Sword of Haste in Diablo I ... as did nearly everyone else on Battlenet at the time. In Diablo II, however, Blizzard introduced 'socketing,' which allowed gamers to add gems to special weapons to provide them with a

The PC PowerPlay carpark, 4am



## THE SECRET COW LEVEL

A few years ago, when Battlenet was new and bursting at the seams with avid Diablo players, there was a rumour going around about 'the secret cow level,' which suggested that a secret level would become available if gamer clicked on one of the cows enough times. Even though this rumour was never substantiated, the programmers at Blizzard decided to incorporate a secret cow level into Diablo II. I won't give away details, but it involves the Horadric Cube, Wilt's Leg and a Town Portal Tome. If you can't figure it out, visit http://www.battle.net/diablo2/quests/cow.shtml but be warned - it is very dangerous!

much-needed alternative. The LoD expansion, however, takes this one step further by increasing the rate at which socketed items and gems are found during each Act and by adding some rare alternatives such as jewels and runes. Special charms can even be kept within a character's inventory for extra bonuses as well!

To increase the difference in playing with each character class, some extra items have also been incorporated into LoD. Necromancers can now carry preserved heads to help defend themselves from

attack while druids and barbarians can access special types of headgear to emphasise some of their abilities. Assassins can use a weapon from the new 'claw' class variety in each hand during combat - a must with some of the martial arts skills discussed above. While many Diablo II veterans out there may bemoan the lack of space within the inventory, fear not, Blizzard did remember to double the size of the Personal Stash so favourite weapons and gems can now be stored without too much deliberation. A weapon swapping feature has also been included to allow people to

easily alternate between different weapon/shield combinations at the flick of a switch. Unfortunately, a 'quick sort' button did not make it onto LoD's list of innovations so gamers will have to keep shuffling those potions to fit in that much needed Zombie Head.

### The final straw...

Diablo II: Lord of Destruction is a very welcome addition to Diablo II and certainly lives up to Blizzard's usual standards of quality. Aside from providing two new characters, an extra chapter and a lot more gameplay time, LoD allows the gamer to explore a larger variety of weapon and armour alternatives to get that ultimate combat combination. Lord of Destruction seems very finished, contains few bugs, and is certainly worth the additional cost for any Diablo II fan - after all, everyone wants to happen after Baal leaves at the end of Diablo II, don't they?

**Ryan Hovingh**

## PCPP

**FOR**
■ New items and characters to revive Diablo II
■ No obvious flaws
■ Simply a great game

**AGAINST**
■ It's a pity that LoD is only an expansion...

## 90%

# THE MOON PROJECT

## 100 bums and a camera... oh no wait, that's a different moon project

Just look at those peachy globes



**ONLINE**

www.topware.com
No, not tupperware,
you fool

**A** few years ago some disgruntled New Zealanders did something no one ever dreamed possible: they came up with an idea. The Queen was on her way and they were going to give her a special greeting. Special because it would involve dropping their trousers in unison as she rode past in the Royal

### the computer player can throw some really nasty surprises your way - and without cheating!

Roller. They called it the Moon Project.
Time went slowly by until, in the year 2150, colonists on the Moon decided to invoke the spirits of that fateful day and started their own Moon Project - except this

time they were going to drop their dacks to the whole planet Earth. They would build a military installation that ringed the Moon itself, a piece of engineering so complex, so vast and so expensive that anyone even thinking of building it would be put in a padded cell with a stuffed Teletubby doll. Well, this is a realtime strategy game not an Iain Banks novel!

The Moon Project is the sequel to the highly regarded, rated and complimented Earth 2150 from German developer Topware, and also the spiritual child of Eidos' Warzone 2100 which originated many of Earth 2150's concepts. As you can tell from the screenshots, this is a

fully 3D resource-based RTS, not of the Dark Reign 2/Battlezone ilk but one that follows the more traditional isometric formula laid down by Westwood all those years ago.

### Bums!

The features and gameplay ideas that made Earth 2150 such a hit have all been brought back by Topware in what amounts to a refinement of the original, rather than a radical overhaul. If you haven't played Earth, those ideas revolved around making full use of the advantages of having a 3D engine; real line of sight and elevation rules, using underground as well as surface areas, simultaneous operations from multiple bases and a complex AI system for both your forces and your opponents.

The game's protagonists are the Eurasian Dynasty (a whole army of hot sexy Eurasian babes - woohoo!) the United Civilised States (or the Un-Civilised States) and the Lunies (Moon people) and they each have something different to offer. The Eurasians specialise in tanks, helicopters and girls with honey coloured skin and big almond shaped eyes, while the UCS get off on speed and mobility, and no girls at all. The Lunies, whose babes all wear space suits and so force upon them a sexual fetish for brightly coloured hose fittings and knobs

The enemy exploits a crack in the defences

with little taps on the end, have the best tech and the most original combat units of all.

The teams are well balanced from a multiplayer point of view. Topware received a lot of feedback from Earth 2150, and it's interesting to note that it only supports four players on a LAN or online. Many RTS titles have foolishly and dishonestly boasted that they could support up to as many as 32 players; here at least the developer and publisher are honest.

### Arouse Me With Your Deformities

Topware has cranked up the capabilities of the 3D engine for The Moon Project, giving it the ability to deform terrain, create realtime lighting effects for weapons fire

and collateral damage and an enhanced particle effect capability making combat look even more spectacular and intense. One thing that could have been improved upon though is the zoom level, it would be nice to be able to really see all these great effects by zooming out a little further than the game normally allows.

### Bend over and cough

The overall structure of Moon Project is quite different from any other RTS (except 2150 of course). The player begins with a main base and works from there to any new mission area. That base (or bases) stay with you throughout the game and forms a hub from which all your operations begin, and return to. If you have resources - this time they are energy and minerals - left over in your mission area you can transport them and any vehicles left back to your main base for future use. You can also build units back at your main base and transport them to the mission map to speed things up if you don't want to waste resources or have the room to build many structures.

The Moon Project also boasts some

pretty good AI routines and your own units' behaviour can be controlled quite extensively through the unit scripting system. If you don't want to muck about with too much micromanagement, you just assign combat units to a simple script that lets you give them basic orders. However, if you prefer to control your soldiers individual bowel movements, you can set them up with an advanced battle unit script that gives access to a wide range of commands such as trousers down, wipe, turtle wax, dry clean, resupply, fire mode, etc. Topware has even looked out for the completely hopeless amongst us by including the Prima Strategy guide in the game box.

It's a shame this had to be released at the same time as Emperor; it's hard to see it beating the assembled might of EA's marketing and Westwood's long history. Yet if you can divert your curiosity from Dune for long enough, you may find yourself over the Moon (that was clever wasn't it?) with this new effort from those top people at Topware. It's a better game, after all.

**George Soropos**

## PCPP

**FOR**
- Well balanced combatants
- Visually attractive
- Tricky AI

**AGAINST**
- Steep learning curve
- Can't build structures underground

**OVERALL**
*An intelligent and polished follow-up to Earth 2150*

## 87%

# STARTOPIA

Bend. Stretch. Reach for the Stars. Bend. Stretch. Reach for the Stars.

Space Vixens from the galaxy of sex!

**S** adly, Douglas Adams is no longer with us. Credited with single-handedly creating the genre of humorous sci-fi, the Hitch-Hiker's Guide novels (or at least the earlier, funny ones) have had a huge influence on the games industry, from blind referencing to more subtle injections of frippery. And let's not forget Doug's own gaming efforts, from a text adventure version of his primary cash cow through to Spaceship Titanic, which was basically a text adventure with graphics.

Another prominent place in the obituary column has recently been filled by Bullfrog software. Sure, the company may still technically be solvent, but the creative force behind such greats as Syndicate and Dungeon Keeper has long since gone, leaving the once proud firm a hollow appendage of EA. There was a time when the distinctive Bullfrog logo on a game box was an infallible cue to purchase it, but today it is a badge of shame.

Fortunately for gamers everywhere, the staff who fled the internal turmoil at Bullfrog haven't dropped off the face of the Earth, but have formed their own startups. Once such splinter group is Mucky Foot, the team

behind the innovative but flawed Urban Chaos. Startopia is a return to form for this team, who produced a number of similar games for Bullfrog, like Theme Park and Theme Hospital. Readers familiar with these titles might do well to imagine Startopia as a "Theme Space Station," only it's considerably more complex than its prequels, and makes a stab at the space humour genre too.

**Taurus, Torus. Spot the difference**

Startopia is set in a galaxy recently ravaged by an unimaginably massive war,

presumably with a death toll in the grillions. With most of its population killed, many of the former civilisation's space stations lie abandoned, devoid of life. As the galactic economy recovers, you find yourself in the position of interstellar property developer. You must occupy one of these space hulks, and step by step, inch by inch, redevelop it with all the mod-cons that your clients might desire, defeat your rivals, and create the greatest shop-over destination in the universe.
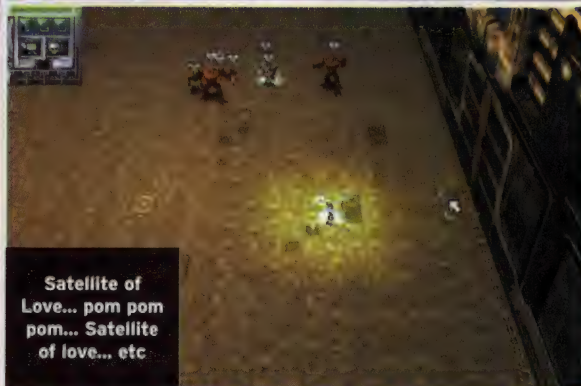
Each game takes place on interior of one

## imagine Startopia as a "Theme Space Station," only much more complex than its prequels

Satellite of Love... pom pom pom... Satellite of love... etc

such station, a toroid divided into three decks and 16 distinct segments. As your complex expands, you'll move up as the need for specialised facilities rises, and into new segments as you run out of room. The bottom level, the Engineering Deck, is where each mission begins, and you build all the facilities for storing energy, recycling, docking ships so forth.

One level up is the Entertainment Deck, a garden of unearthly delights where you place your massage parlours, boxing rings, temples, and retail outlets. It's also a good zone to build your Food-O-Mats and Lavotrons in, to keep your visitors well fed and sanitary. A busy Lavotron running at peak capacity is truly a sight to behold; for not only does it resemble a toilet the size of an office block, but audible grunting and straining emanate from within it.

The highest level you can develop on is the Bio Deck, a glass topped habitat that can simulate any planetary environment. As the floor is made of 'nano-soil', it becomes a simple matter to vary the height and climate of the terrain, as well as add or remove bodies of water. This becomes vital later on, as each different species visiting your station will have their own idea on what constitutes a "natural" environment.

### Galactic goof-ups

There are nine different races in Startopia, and they differ in ways both subtle and overt. They all have their own different needs and wants, and the station manager hoping to extract money from all of their cravings must have the facilities in place to do so. Some needs, like food, health cover and sanitation, are universal. Others are more rarified; violent aliens need boxing rings and seedy space bars.



## THE COMPUTER IS YOUR FRIEND

Mucky Foot are more than conscious of the year they're releasing Startopia in, and as a tribute to Kubrick's space epic your cybernetic assistant throughout the game is called VAL. This Virtual Artificial Lifeform is obviously modelled on the voice-over in The Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy, and when it's not disrespecting your management efforts it will offer up semi-amusing nuggets of xeno-trivia. He acts as both rolling tutorial and warning system, and on occasion will actually save you from yourself.
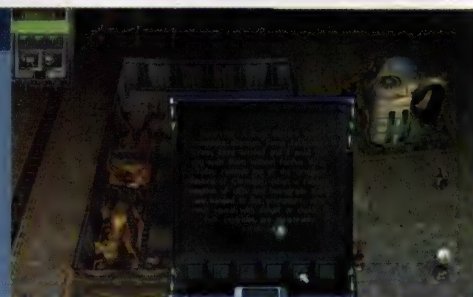
Poncy aliens need fancy hotels. Even your buildings have needs; most of them need to be manned, for a start.

Staff can only be hired from those aliens wandering in and out of your facility. Their qualifications will vary widely, so it's best to give them all the once over, even if you're just getting them to run a trash compactor. Sometimes staff automatically assigned will prove unsatisfactory, injecting a level of

uncertainty into game a already requiring vigilance. There's a definite buzz from taking on a new employee, as they'll jump for joy the instant you hit the hire button.

There is a battery of other animations the visitors and residents on the station will display. Their most pressing need and allegiance will appear in an icon above their heads, but this feature is of little use to planning. Most of the time you're looking

## THE CRATE OF THE ART
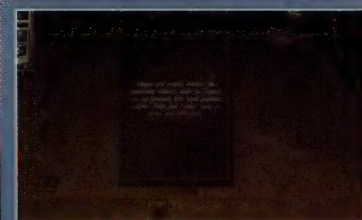
Like in all high-quality video games, crates and crate management play a central role in Startopia. Everything you can buy and sell comes in crates, including supplies, exotic materials, and buildings. Yes, buildings. Energy and matter are interchangeable in Startopia, and you will often purchase or be given large structures in crate form. To aid in moving crates around is a "pattern buffer," a virtual stack of crates where they can be stored without fear of loss or theft. If you're a crate-a-holic, warehouse structures can be built for storing crates in large quantities. Who knows, play long and hard enough and you may uncover a crate of "turdite," a high energy substance which is apparently rarer than rocking horse dung.
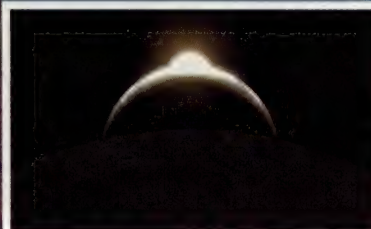
down on the proles like the ants they are, so the best way to determine what needs building the most is to look at the overview window. From there you can get the stats on everyone on board, assess their needs as a group, and act accordingly.

While the energy collector built first off the bat may be an enchanting structure, storing money (energy) in a hovering mercurial blob, most of the early structures are bland and unengaging. Fear not; before long you'll have your very own Disco-Tek. If you just can't wait for some 70s silliness, remember that you can build lava lamps almost as soon as you boot up.

### The operational art of war in space

There are three basic styles of play: mission, sandbox, and multiplayer. The 25 missions that come with Startopia are a carefully designed tour into increasing levels of complexity, and thus difficulty. They gradually and patiently introduce all the buildings, races, challenges and threats of the game, and represent the primary singleplayer experience. Sandbox mode is basically the skirmish option;

expansion for its own sake in a generic environment.

Multiplayer only supports up to four players, but this is due to the way the stations are laid out more than any technical limitation. Conflict is more about out-producing than out-fighting one's opponents, due to the complex infrastructure needed to field even a single fighting unit, and the limited amount and variety of terrain. On the plus side, most every means of connecting computers together is supported.

### Woomera, we have a problem

There is no fixed viewing angle; you can vary the pitch, yaw, and zoom to your heart's content. If you're a big fan of changing camera angles then you're in for a treat, as you'll be doing it quite a bit. The walls inside your space station are sheer, and often scrolling around leads to backing into corners. Where some games would let you move back as far as you like, rendering the wall translucent so you can still see what's going on, Startopia forces you to think inside the box you live in.

Fortunately, since terrain slopes upwards in the distance, navigation in larger stations isn't too much of a chore. Just as well, since there is no real map function. A tap of a key will transport you between decks, but there no such facility for jumping to points across your increasingly linear empire. Event windows give you the option of instantly viewing any tragedy, such as the death of a visitor, but this opportunity only presents itself after a bad thing has happened.

While the parameters for success are fairly simple and well defined, determining how to meet them can be more obtuse. The missions are presented in a manner that gradually introduces the game concepts and raises the difficulty, but how to use all your new options is not always apparent. The alien setting and arbitrary game rules mean the player must constantly monitor all available indicators to stay on top of things, and thus the basic challenge of the game comes more from comprehending what's going on than prudent management of resources.

Captain Brown and the Brownonians take on Uranus
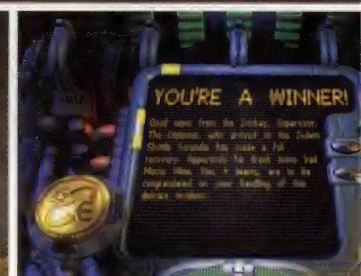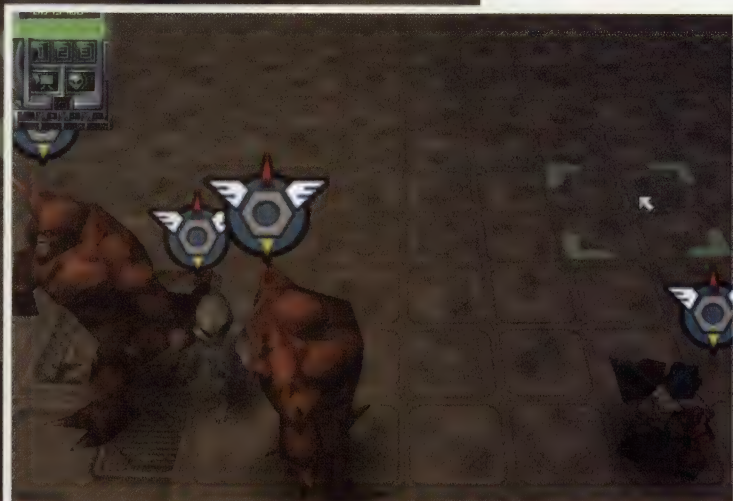
### What are you doing, Wildgoose?

Perhaps the weakest link is combat, with the defence of your empire very much secondary to its micromanagement. There is little scope for tactics, and no way to control individual units. Rallying points may be laid down, and given differing priorities, but the rapid deployment of units that was seen in Dungeon Keeper is not apparent here. While there is always a sense of urgency, one never feels as though the game is moving quickly.

The pace of expansion is fairly plodding. Sudden change only occurs when you do something wrong, making the frequent autosaves a vital part of the learning experience. Rounding out the difficulty factor is the unpredictable and unknowable outside influence of astronomical events, epidemics, invasions and so on. At a moments notice you can find yourself having to evacuate an entire developed segment due to a "star-quake."

Startopia is not the best game ever produced in its genre, but it's a worthy successor to the Theme-greats of yesteryear. Apparently its quite mod-friendly too, so in the coming months we could well see versions based on Red Dwarf, Dr. Who, and maybe even The Hitch-Hiker's Guide itself. One could think of worse tributes to the most beloved humour/sci-fi author of the 20th century. Perhaps a commemorative medallion awarded to every school kid in the country. Or a sixth book to the trilogy...

**James Cottee**

## ALIEN NATION

Nine distinct alien races populate the space station, each with their own skills, needs, and racial prejudices. They also have some bizarre hobbies, from starship spotting to collecting the tiny plastic tables you get in pizza boxes.
**Dahanese Sirens:** Angelic space sluts, ideal workers for your seedy but strangely appealing space brothels
**Greys:** Due to their proficiency at probing, these nondescript aliens make good doctors
**Groullien Salt Hogs:** Blue collar aliens, best suited to dirty work in all its forms
**Karmaramas:** Rastafarian space hippies who generate good vibes for all.
**Kasgorvians:** Big biffy bare-knuckle bastards built for battle
**Polvakian Gem Slugs:** Picky, choosy, slimy, good for nothing space-aristos
**Thyorian Grekka Targs:** Tech heads, vital



for keeping your com systems on-line
**Turrakkens:** Two-heads are better than one. Skilled at pure research.
**Zedem Monks:** A lanky, holier-than-thou species for running your astro-temples

# STEEL SOLDIERS

## Fill these steel men full of lead!



988 / 020000




In the future, war is pastel, the colour of Robot Love

T ake one part bombastic military hard-head (think John Wayne) add your favourite mission-based war movie (Guns of Navarone, Aliens or Saving Private Ryan will do nicely) and then give it a colourbond "Meet George Jetson" coating and you're standing in the ballpark with the Z sequel.

It's a charming combination of over-the-top hardware, jargon and all-in warfare balanced with super-overdrawn characters, from Arnie-sound-a-like henchmen to a Texas Governor bad-guy and Full Metal Jacket wannabe Drill Sergeant. Like the first, Z2 takes pot shots at the war-y RTS genre that it is not only trying to compete in but also outdo.

English developers Bitmap Brothers have always had a slightly different take on things and it's interesting to watch the two main characters, the Drill Sergeant-like commander Zod (American) and the dry, detached (English) technician Lassar continually at odds. Zod's got the heart, energy, gun love'n and is in charge but Lassar is the brains of the outfit. Do you think they're trying to say something?

Steel Soldiers takes place well after the first game where a peace is finally being negotiated between the red and the blue robots of the Corporation and Transglobal. All appears well until a Transglobal transport heads into a neutral zone, where our ever-loving Zod sends some of his "best men" to investigate. Note that I use the term "best men" instead of "trigger happy, cousin-love'n rednecks", which would probably be closer to the mark. Naturally the transport ends up full of small, round, bullet-shaped holes and Zod and his bots have some explaining to do. Luckily for them, they uncover something that smells very much like a conspiracy and might just avert court martials, firing squads and recycling bins if they can get to the bottom of it.

### Hired Guns

For this game the Bitmaps called on the skills of a professional scriptwriter and it shows: the story not only gives plenty of opportunities for guys with dubious accents and satiric war-speak but gives a great frame for the 30 singleplayer missions and a host of objectives.

These objectives are all things we've seen before from a host of RTS games, things like escort the pratty English guy to decode the thingy, to rescue the gung-ho American war monger and so on, but the skill is in the way they tie together. First you

have to find and rescue the two "best men". That leads you to having to destroy the evidence of the downed ship, and then the communications post. As you discover more of the conspiracy you have to battle through a map to commandeer a shuttle to track the transport back to its source. When you need more men you're off to liberate prisoners of war and so on. Each map has a Guns of Navarone go in and do this feel to it. Naturally, this is a realtime strategy game so most of these objectives do involve building a base, manufacturing units and, to quote one of the "best men", trying to "mosey over with a six-pack of kick-ass".

Most of the missions have more than one objective and, thankfully, they don't tend to change on the fly. Each game does take a little while to get your manufacturing capabilities up to scratch and once you are going it does take a while to build the squads you want. This isn't to say the games start slowly; Z2 gives you a fair contingent of starting troops and unlike a lot of RTS games things tend to get hot very quickly.

### Touch and Go

Zod is the right bot for the job. His John Wayne ways suit the gameplay to a tee. Z2 is about action. Zod doesn't care about

The brown hills witness more burning Robot Love

harvesters collecting crystals or dirty robots scrapping minerals out of the ground. He's all about action and blowing things up. Fun stuff. He's got it all sorted out to its simplest form. Each territory you control generates from 1000 to 5000 credits per minute, based on its corresponding rating from 1 to 5, for you to fund your little escapades. The ones worth the most are always the hardest to defend and usually the ones towards the

middle of the map. To get things going there are usually buildings to be claimed for the first side to reach the flag placed somewhere in the territory. Who dares, wins.

This element of touch and go is exaggerated by many of the game's features. The 3D terrain offers advantages to those who get to the high land. The line of sight means you can play hide and seek in territories and around mountains. Each unit

has a sighting range as well as a weapon range and some vehicles, especially artillery, can fire much further than they can see by themselves making scouts very valuable. Finally, you can only build in captured territories (yes Z fans, you can build what you want, where you want now), although you keep buildings even if you lose the area. All of these game elements plus the fact that even holding a piece of territory for a little while gives you an immediate cash boost, makes Z2 a very fast game and one where bold moves are rewarded.

This might seem like a simplified version of capture the flag but in practice you'll find it gets pretty tactical. You can tell when territories get converted (unless all of your radars are being jammed) and you know where the flags are on each map. If you spread your forces too thin they get cut to shreds; if you move only in bulk you tend to get caught in pincer movements or are too slow to tag the flags. This leads to setting up strategic command points where you have decent defences and sending teams out around them, ready to pull back if too many bot limbs start flying.

The pace of the game is also dictated by a strange factor: throwaway troops. They might be god-fearing constructs crying "Oh,

## HEY, I WAS BORN IN THE 80S, CHUMP!

John Wayne: n, actor, 1907 - 1979, real name: Marion Michael Morrison, also known as the "Duke". Immortalised in Denis Leary's song Asshole as well as a bunch of movies where he played himself ... and spoke in staggered speech. Films included: Two-Fisted Law (1932), They Were Expendable (1945), The Longest Day (1962), The Alamo (1960) and True Grit (1969).
Jetsons: n, cartoon. Original series ran for 24 episodes airing in 1962-63. Followed the wacky day-to-day adventures of the Jetsons, a 21st century family, who lived in an apartment in the sky, zipped around in jet-chubes and had cars that folded into suitcases. Now often viewed as the unfunny precursor to Futurama.
Guns of Navarone: n, film, 1961. Great WWII movie. A hand picked team consisting of an American officer and mountaineer (Gregory Peck), an English Major (Anthony Quayle), an explosives expert (David Niven) and a Greek resistance fighter (Anthony Quinn) go in to take out the enormous guns locked in mountainous terrain that are unassailable from sea or air and which control a strategic channel in the Aegean Sea.

Only behind concrete walls can Robot Love truly be expressed

my God," when they are under fire but, hey, you can always build more. A good commander will keep the damage spread around and repair units with their construction bots but the units themselves don't always make this easy. To give you an idea, the basic trooper is called a "Psycho" and will fearlessly charge into battle. Even on defensive they don't seem to have the self-preservation instincts of Norman Bates.

In most RTS games this would really damp my powder but somehow it works for

## Even on the normal difficulty you will find the AI challenging and extremely difficult to defeat

Steel Soldiers. The soldiers will do some things by themselves, mainly dangerous things mind you... like running out to touch the flag to capture territories or to leap into an abandoned vehicle, or to charge after snipers shooting at them from beyond their sight. It's all about action and you have to be there for the action. When any of your troops come under attack a window shows the unit under fire and you can jump right there. Once again, this keeps the game moving and ensures that you are on you toes and don't

get to just forget "secured" areas.

### Think Tanks

Although individual troopers are about as keen as a dumdum round, the enemy AI is actually pretty advanced. If you don't control the bridges and play a game to limit its options, you will find the AI does not operate off a script and it will attack you from all angles.

Sometimes it will come from the left and the next game it will come head on. It will try to over run you with jeeps and then it will try air power. If you have all of one unit or all heavy anti-tank guns, it will send in choppers which they can't shoot down and just pick them off. If you have a token air defence gun, it will swamp that first and then send in the air wing.

Even on the normal difficulty you will find the AI challenging and very difficult to defeat until you work out just how the maps work, where the bridges are, where your additional buildings are waiting and which territories offer the best cover and visibility. Even once you know all of this you have to get a hang of using the APCs, snipers at the edge of their range, bunkers, gun emplacements and a host of other tactics to get you through. On hard things are really interesting.

## BITMAP BROTHERS

This is a company with a long track record and one that has achieved almost a cult status. Just say the name and it will spark nostalgia in older gamers. They might be remembering Xenon, all arcade action from 1988, where 16-bit computers met space fighter combat.
Or maybe Speedball, from later that year, springs to mind. Perhaps it's the ancient Greek action game Gods from a decade ago that brings a smile to their lips.
The Brothers have gone on to release Xenon 2, Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe, Chaos Engine 1 & 2, Magic Pockets, Cadaver 1 & 2 and most recently Z, Speedball 2100 (for PSX) and now Steel Soldiers.

In the forests,
in the fields:
robot love

A final weapons-grade aspect of the AI is that its individual troops don't seem any smarter than yours. It uses them well, in broad strokes, but it doesn't display the uncanny control that some AIs do, which mock your human drag-and-click status.

### Gun Control

The whole game is a fine balance between well-crafted units with distinct strengths and weaknesses and keeping the game moving without moving each unit millimetre by millimetre to get their optimum benefits. The pacing of the game is excellent. When you start advancing the action is exciting and explosive. When both sides are gearing up for the next big push and you discover an enemy strong-point with the edge of your scout's visual range you are often granted precious time, before you are discovered, to move your plans into action, moving up snipers or calling in air strikes to take out a mass of heavy tanks or guns.

In these lulls precision is called for. It's at these times the controls seem like a big old shotgun, when you'd really rather a scalpel or at least a gun you can hold in one hand. Attack and movement commands are handled with left clicks to activate the unit and left-clicks to move the unit. Right clicks

will cancel unit selection and holding and dragging with the right button will scroll the map. This can lead to mistaken de-selections if your finger slips or grabbing someone when you really want another unit to move there. You can scroll around the map by just pushing to the edges by even at its fastest this isn't quite up to speed and using the mini-map to move often results in pulling up a building, grabbing another unit or getting a "can't go there" icon. I'm aware these controls aren't exactly wacky for an RTS but the whole system "floats" a little too much not quite giving the precision you'd really like. With some practice this isn't such a pain, but the controls do feel a little rubbery in the middle of a package of such gleaming polished mettle.

### Steely Glints

Z2 is a lot of fun, from the screwball story to the fast pace, but is also a good RTS offering and should be taken seriously for a lot of reasons beyond the sneaky AI. Steel Soldiers comes with one to eight person multi-player and skirmish modes, as well as GameSpy built into the initial play-game screen making finding online games a snap.

The units in Z2 also deserve special mention. The rock, paper, scissor system is in full effect here but with the addition of true

line of sight, terrain modifiers, bunkers, APCs, and research facilities which let you upgrade armour, speed and damage. You have scout choppers, attack choppers, stealth bomber strafing, all manner of tanks, virtually invisible Spies who can infect building with computer viruses, snipers who can kill the drivers of any vehicle on the ground leaving it abandoned (and ready for use) and many other offensive options.

There are heavily armoured APCs, transport choppers and even teleporters, at the high end, for surprise troop delivery; for defence there is everything from turrets to anti-missile laser installations and deflector shields. All up, the 30 units (robots and vehicles) offer their own real strengths and have their uses right to the end. There's just enough units for you to keep in mind all the possibilities and to process them quickly.

The whole presentation of the game keeps the Bitmap Brothers's rough edges including the pseudo-animated graphic novel cut scenes (think old "Captain America throws his mighty shield" cartoon) and slightly old-school pre-game interface screens. This is Bitmap Brothers at their best, leaving the package a little rough so that you know it's the gameplay and fun you've come to see not the bows and ribbons.

**Timothy C. Best**

# CONFLICT ZONE

## Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire?

Tanks, triangles and lens flare all make for one pretty game

**T**he news teams who spent time in Timor, the Middle East, North Africa or Vietnam produce the closest there is to reality television. We see a lot of gunplay and explosions on prime time but only when you see reports from 'war torn' provinces do you begin to feel any kind of emotion. Watching people huddle in doorways away from stray bullets is harrowing, powerful television. Modern warfare is played as much on the screens by the dinner tables around the world as on the battlefield.

Bad press is damaging like a missile in the face on the modern front. While weaponry has been synthesised to an impressive likeness in games, there's been no mention of the media in the line of fire. Conflict Zone is the first real time strategy game to approach this war reality in a focussed way.

### Quelle horreur!

There are two campaigns to play, as either the ICP (the goodies) or GHOST, (the baddies). Throughout North Africa and Eastern Europe, traditional real time strategy campaigns take place while (American)

media coverage comments on your actions. So how important is the role of the media in Conflict Zone? I'm glad you asked...

During the course of a mission, you will be forced to make decisions that will cause the outside world to react. The delicate relationship between your troops and society is represented by the public opinion rating. Should you go into a town with guns blazing and kill some unfortunate locals (so-called 'collateral damage'), your rating will go down. Higher public opinion ratings mean more trust in your actions and a greater arsenal at your disposal. In addition to normal mission objectives, every move you make reflects directly on your combat capabilities because of this rating.

### Télévision: la drogue de la nation

To punctuate the visual aspect of televisual war, French developers MASA have used an impressive 3D engine, which means more lens flare for your screenshot dollar.

This is an impressive engine producing detailed units and vehicles, lovely smoke effects and bodies flying hither and yon in response to bazookas.

There are three modes of view. The default setting of the camera operates a little like the camera in Black & White. Arrow keys move the position of the camera, the cursor at the edges of the screen alter the pitch and direction. Mouse wheel zooms the camera in and out.

The elaborate free camera is more distracting than the fixed modes in a battle but is recommended for those of us who need pretty screen grabs.

Base building and maintenance is the

> ## The delicate relationship between your troops and society is represented by the public opinion rating

focus of all management as resources don't need to be gathered. Basically, MASA has replaced gold or iron with public opinion. The better your troops act as peacekeepers, the more reward you receive.

It's a clever concept and makes you consciously aware of your tactics and actions, especially since civilians are everywhere. ICP are the goodies after all. As

## LA GUERRE DE TELEVISION

The joys of a Vietnam or Gulf War are yours, as media and the outside world are watching. Saving civilians will raise your opinion rating and open up more powerful units and weapons. Conversely, "collateral damage" will see public opinion and funding decline. Smile for the camera...

TV reporters scurry around the battlefield, so try not to kill any civilians under their watchful eye

GHOST you have 'carte blanche' (that's American for fruit van) to raze your enemies to the Earth.

### French war sans French voices

Forces of the GHOST or ICP comprise foot soldiers such as marines, bazooka dudes and grenadiers. Combat vehicles include armoured jeeps, mobile artillery and tanks. There hasn't been any great effort to distinguish the arsenal of the two sides and sadly, the voices for the troops are the same for each side. It would have been nice to have some different troop voices, rather than Americans on both sides. Perhaps British ICP guys and American terrorists? Not even the French would dare!

Troops have three attitude modes that will dictate their response to combat. Aggressive means they will chase a fight; defensive, they will avoid combat; while strict means they will act somewhere in between. It's a uniform means of defining your army's responses and easy to use. A menu of orders is available on screen. More often than not, troops can be directed simply and effectively with just the cursor.

The other great leap forward in Conflict Zone is the inclusion of commanders. These are AI allies that can be instructed to take care of certain tasks allowing the player to concentrate on whichever part of the game they prefer. Sick of base building? Get your commander to handle it while you go off and kick some head. Commanders are more than adequate and not prone to foolish churning out of a single unit. They still need occasional attention though - it's a game, not a simulation.

This is an interesting Real Time Strategy that does a good job of presenting the best that RTS has been in the past with a few fresh twists to the game. Very involving and challenging - at any difficulty setting. There's a good variety in the style of missions too. My only complaint is that the GHOST missions don't add anything really new to the experience.

The subject matter of the media has been approached with some realism, but the treatment of both sides of the conflict is as simplistic as Cowboys & Indians, the Allies & the Nazis.

This is depressing because if there's one

thing that the media has taught us, it's that war is not black & white.

Look forward to this subject being explored further in RTS games. Not only the watchful gaze of the media over the action but perhaps media units, that can be directed into a combat zone for good media coverage or diverted away from a massacre. Even enemy media units that can tell a different 'truth'. With the media included further in RTS games, our experience can approach the true nature of modern warfare.

**John Dewhurst**

### ROGER THAT...

Extracting refugees from the battlefield requires a refugee camp in your base and a civilian helicopter. The helicopter is directed like offensive units and needs to approach danger to save lives. This "peacekeeper" role lends a defensive imperative to overall strategy.

**PCPP**

**FOR**
- Involving and challenging
- Welcome innovations
- Great visuals

**AGAINST**
- Trad RTS at heart
- Lack of variety
- Media gimmicky

**OVERALL**
*Media is a good idea done not particularly well*

**84%**

# ALONE IN THE DARK 4

In which we go into a dark room and get a grip on ourselves

**S**weat beaded down my face as I sat listening to Carnby recount his wild tale of terror and despair. Surely he was exaggerating! I knew something of his past adventures but nothing that could prepare me for this truly shocking revelation. "Let me understand this correctly old friend," I said breathlessly. "You spent a whole weekend on a secluded island with beautiful, terrified girl and you never, even once tried to get her pants off? No seduction-by-the-fireplace trick? You didn't tell her *any* stories about your deprived childhood? No? Those mysterious forces you mentioned, you don't think they perhaps, broadened your mind a little, if you know what I mean? I noticed you were humming along to the Pet Shop Boys on the radio earlier, only harmless fun was it? Good, good. Just asking."

Ah, good ol' Carnby eh? In an era when the remake has become a creative shortcut for the film and music industries, it is not unexpected for the games industry to follow suit for much the same reasons. It's a bit like adding another floor onto a house - the foundations are there already and all you have to do is whack on a few more bricks and a bit of lino. What was unexpected by many gamers was that the renovators would take their eye off the ball so badly that they would end up with a 70s bachelor pad instead of a hip 21st century bungalow. In other words, while the Alone In The Dark series has been in cryogenic suspension another series, Resident Evil, has been taking the ball forward. Further forward than Alone 4.

### The Light Unfantastic

The only real innovation Alone 4 has to offer is that it, unlike any other game, has a spectacular ability to light up its painted backdrops as though they were 3D renders. Unfortunately it isn't that spectacular and you very soon stop noticing it as anything special. If this is what the development team spent a lot of their time on then it was time wasted indeed, especially when you consider that it is most likely this feature that makes the game run so slowly. For a title with painted backdrops the frame rate is appalling, forcing me to run it at 1024X768 (on a 1GHz PIII + GeForce2) to make the game playable.

Speaking of wasted time, how would you like to spend a few weeks on a key hunt? Clichés aren't necessarily a bad thing. Put together thoughtfully they can be very entertaining. Consider any Hollywood film you've enjoyed recently as an example. But the key hunt? Now there's a cliché that can really get in under your fingernails, rub salt into a wound and even irritate the Pope. There are more keys in Alone 4 than a locksmith's warehouse, and what is even beyond irritating is the fact that the shotgun in your hand is all the key anyone would ever need!
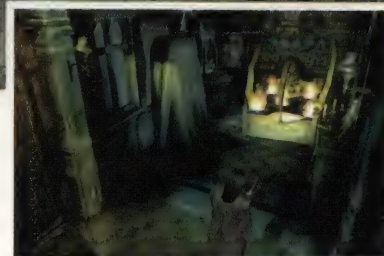
On the softer, more tightly clothed side of things there's Aline, your female alter ego in Alone 4. Sadly she's a bit of a cliché too.

Aline's path through the game is different but related to Carnby's in that she is stuck on the same island, in the same house, but with different agendas. Her game leans a bit more towards the puzzle solving however, while Carnby gets more of the big guns.
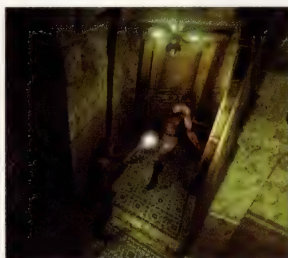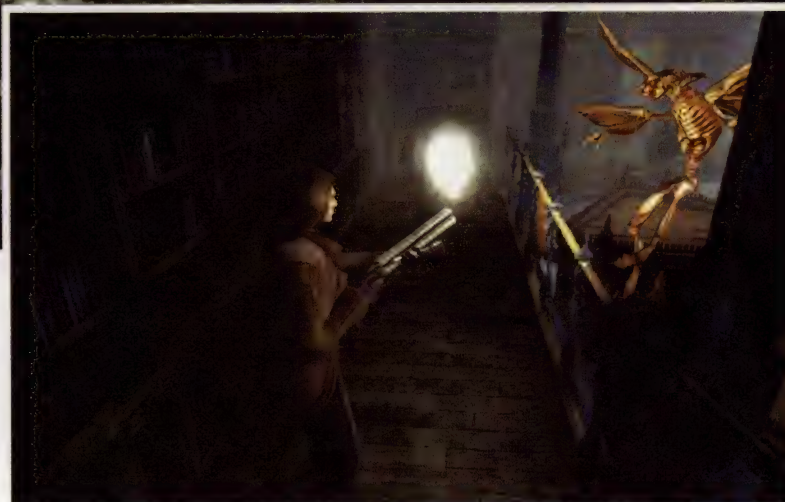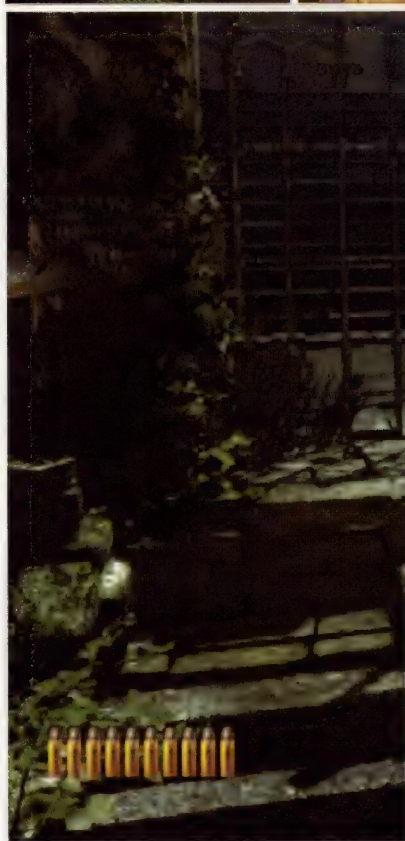
Who let the dogs out? Woof woof etc

## Say It With Flowers, Not Music

The people are in place, the stage set, all we need are the scary bits. Shoot me down in flames if I'm out of line here, but a horror game needs scary bits. Ultimately the main problem with Alone 4 is that it really isn't very scary.

Darkworks has made a deliberate effort to make Carnby's new adventure more like the first instalment of the series than the latter two, mainly because it is the fans' favourite and the scariest to boot. But what they obviously haven't done is play all the Resident Evil games and study them to make sure that their product was one or two notches better.

If they had they might have learned a few tricks from the Capcom people about making games that can frighten the game pads out of people's hands (several RE moments have caused me to drop my

**the main problem with Alone 4 is that it really isn't very scary**

bundle, so to speak).

Now you might think that this is obvious but one of those tricks would be to *avoid* playing the same something-nasty-is-about-to-happen music every single time something nasty is about to happen. You know those B-grade movie moments where the hero is approaching some darkened corner where some maniac with a combine harvester lies in wait and you know something is going to happen because the music swings into short, sharp violin mode? Well Alone 4 is worse because even in those B-grade films they put the music in as a trick occasionally (the combine harvester turns out to be a box of chocolates etc) When you hear the music waft out of your PC speakers it may as well be accompanied by a full screen message shouting 'Look out'!

## Terror Of The Walking Bagpipes

To make matters worse there are the monsters. Obviously they were intended to make matters worse; they aren't there to mow your lawn, but they do so in the wrong kind of way. Now if you were a hideous, unspeakably evil monster you'd want people to shudder at the sight of you, pass water, pass wind, maybe even pass Cathy Freeman doing a 400 metre sprint to the nearest exit. But what you wouldn't want them to do is laugh, which I'm afraid is all I could manage. You see it's pretty hard to be frightened by a gaggle of walking bagpipes. And the zombies? Well again I must defer to Resident Evil, a game that gives good zombie.

So whose fault is it? Alone 4 should have been a much better game than this!

**George Soropos**

# TRAIN SIMULATOR

## I think my brain is melting

Toot toot bloody toot toot toot

### LA VIDA LOCO (SORRY)

Nine locomotives squished into one game. Will Microsoft's generosity ever end? What's more, rather than giving us a bunch of famous trains, TrainSim only includes one cliché - the Flying Scotsman - and five unknown but still important locomotives. In quick sucession then; Flying Scotsman, Golsdorf Series 380, Dash 9, GP38-2, KIHA 31, 2000 Series, 7000 LSE Series, Amtrak AcelaSM Express, Amtrak AcelaSM HHP-8. However if that's not enough for you, there are numerous editors included to create new trains. Totally ace!

**PCPP**

The accusation has been levelled at the Microsoft Flight Simulator family of games that they exist not to entertain users, but to provide Microsoft with revenue from third-party developers who purchase licenses to create add on packs for the software. Microsoft Train Simulator is an even more obviously cynical exercise, existing only to ensnare train nuts and suck cash from small companies who aren't big enough to make their own, stand alone titles.

This rather subjective view of Train Simulator is extreme, but there is much in the title that leads us to believe this view may hold more than a slight grain of truth. Train Simulator exists as a very simple concept; the user takes control of one of nine different locomotives, and drives it along one of six routes. There are steam, diesel and electric locomotives, and this further restricts which locos can be used on which track.

On each route, TrainSim's scripting engine creates a number of different Activities, from the extreme 'Train Rescue' scenario in Japan following an earthquake, to the more mundane 'Break time records on a passenger run' in America. There are also shunting operations, in which the user must assemble individual cars into long trains.

The software is structured like Microsoft Flight Simulator, with a very application-like front end that further

distances TrainSim from being what we would normally consider a game. Initial options are somewhat limited, since the only choices are to take a tutorial, explore a route, do an activity or change the program settings.

The 3D engine works admirably, with high levels of detail on each of the locomotives and on the freight and passenger cars. World detail is also good on the most complex setting, and the landscape looks unique, rather than tile-based, across the whole route.

However, the bottom line of Train Simulator is that this is highly specialised gaming. Highly specialised. Once the relatively complex series of tasks required to get a train moving is completed, there is little else to do but count telegraph poles and sound the horn occasionally. Indeed, if the 'no derails' option is selected, the train drives itself and all the user has to do is count telegraph poles from different camera angles. Activities increase the workload somewhat, but at their most fundamental, these involve merely starting and stopping the train at different times.

Train Simulator has the potential to be huge among a select group of users. The train enthusiast community is massive and it will no doubt accept TrainSim with open arms, especially as the niggly attention to detail is exactly the sort thing train fans

enjoy. However, Microsoft has to have got everything absolutely correct in the simulation or train nuts will eat Bill Gates' little wizards alive, but this reviewer is proud to say he doesn't know how accurate the sim really is... but it appears painfully accurate.

> **there is little else to do but count telegraph poles and sound the horn**

With only six tracks and nine locomotives, Train Simulator seems somewhat restricted out of the box. A real fan could conceivably complete every activity on every route within a couple of days. Once the inevitable third-party add-ons emerge, Train Simulator may become a richer and more interesting product... but only for a certain type.

**Justin 'Fat Controller' Hoffman**

# OUTLIVE

Can you outlive this Starcraft clone one species short of a game?

Dude, where's my game?

**S**ome games are loving homages, tributes to the groundbreakers, memorials to greatness. Others are shameless rip-offs of a proven formula. A game like Starcraft is a prime target for such imitation and a strong, progressive title would have been nice. A highly mediocre shameless rip-off of this RTS masterpiece shouldn't have seen the light of day. Please cue the spotlight for Outlive.

Naturally to create a game with THREE races would be far too derivative. Four's too many, so naturally... Outlive is the story of two races, humans and robots. The Earth's overcrowded but beyond that I remember nothing, since the intro and cutscenes were so boring I forgot to watch them. Cutscenes mostly comprised text scrolling up the screen and I found myself becoming very, very sleepy.

### Look deep into my eyes...

Tutorials should be fast-moving, informative affairs. The human tutorial in Outlive took a little over 50 minutes to complete. If the game had a complex, detailed interface that needed illumination, then fair enough. Fifty minutes taught me that this game needs a 10 minute tutorial. The fact that you can't bypass any tutorial event is remarkable. The fact that I had to wait over ten minutes for some research to be completed is ridiculous. These are prime examples of a poor design ethic that basically ignores the advances made in the past three years.

Frustration at the tutorial was replaced by indifference at the main game. The missions are the usual array of run-for-the-waypoint, develop-and-destroy flavours. They aren't terrible but they aren't special. There is a reasonable range of units and they can be upgraded with research. Since Starcraft, different species generally require various skills and tactics for success. There is really only one species in this game since the robots and the humans are for all purposes the same. Units can be given custom orders for when they disengage from battle but tactics thought is largely irrelevant as missions descend into the O.K. Corral with little opportunity for the player to affect the course of the battle, except in churning out more units.

### One race, no winners

The great innovations that blossomed in Starcraft have been lifted, roughed up and painted in dull browns for Outlive. The cute touch of ruggedly individual unit voices has been reproduced, with lesser voices that grate on the nerves at every turn. The in-game interface of Starcraft was not copied close enough, with numerous pages to click through on your HUD to access all features. Was it just Outlive or do units usually move this slow in RTS games?

This is RTS strictly to the recipe with nothing new. Enjoy nostalgia if nothing else, as this game has been done before and much better. Missing Starcraft? Then you might like Outlive, a competent if largely flawed imposter.

**John Dewhurst**

# STUNT GP

## Remote Controlled Love is Unforgiving

Zoom zoom bloody zoom zoom zoom

**S** tunt GP is a Remote Controlled car racing game. The structure is blissfully basic with a variety of modes and cars, and a portion of the game

## The first track took a lot of work and stupid luck for first place

locked (!) only to be revealed by long hours and desperation. Just quietly, I love these games. They remind me of the joy I felt in Revolt, Rollcage, etc. The fun, weapons, speed, excitement, stupid luck – see the cars take off...!

While maintaining the bright colours and action soundtrack of the genre, the developers have gone for a more sim feel with realistic physics & dynamics in car components, right down to tyre pressure and temperature. The result is RC racing where the cars respond to track surfaces in realistic fashion.

### Aerial Skillz

Some level of realism is the ultimate aim here. Therefore a big stupid arsenal is denied the racer (damn...) but there's still

the chance to demonstrate skillz on the track. RC vehicles can perform various aerial and ground tricks during the race. Points are accumulated which can be spent unleashing the hidden portions of the game.

Many RC vehicles can be chosen and they respond differently to the track conditions. From vans to sporty cars and aerial types, they feel unique... as unique as RC vehicles possibly can, anyway. Cars can be upgraded progressively in all of those components that have been "realised" so painstakingly. The tracks are interesting enough, with some high ramps and nice jumps. Here's the but...

### Uh oh... here it comes...

The problem is that it's just too hard. The first track took a good deal of work and even more stupid luck for the elusive first place. This is on easy, mind you. The commitment required to finish this game should be reserved for the Grand Prix Legends of the world. The difficulty is not really in the speed or skill of the other racers (though that's an issue) but in the fact that this "sim" is so unforgiving.

Sure, make it realistic. But seriously, have you ever watched RC Racing? Those little

buggers flip over when the wind blows the wrong way. If the racing's going to be tight, I want a little forgiveness from the course. All too often, you are knocked over or out of the course because you aren't on a perfect racing line. Rather than being engaging, the races are just too hard for most racers to enjoy.

All up, the game is a great achievement in detail and execution. Greater attention to its being fun over 'pure' (if that's the word) would have made it essential gaming. Perfect only for those who don't get discouraged and RC fans everywhere.

**John Dewhurst**

### CHARGE ME UP

The booster gauge is represented by a battery. Pit stops on every track allow your car to be recharged and repaired. Prudent use of your boost power is needed to win. Stop or one more lap...?

# SPACE TRIPPER

## We're gonna blast those aliens Old Skool!
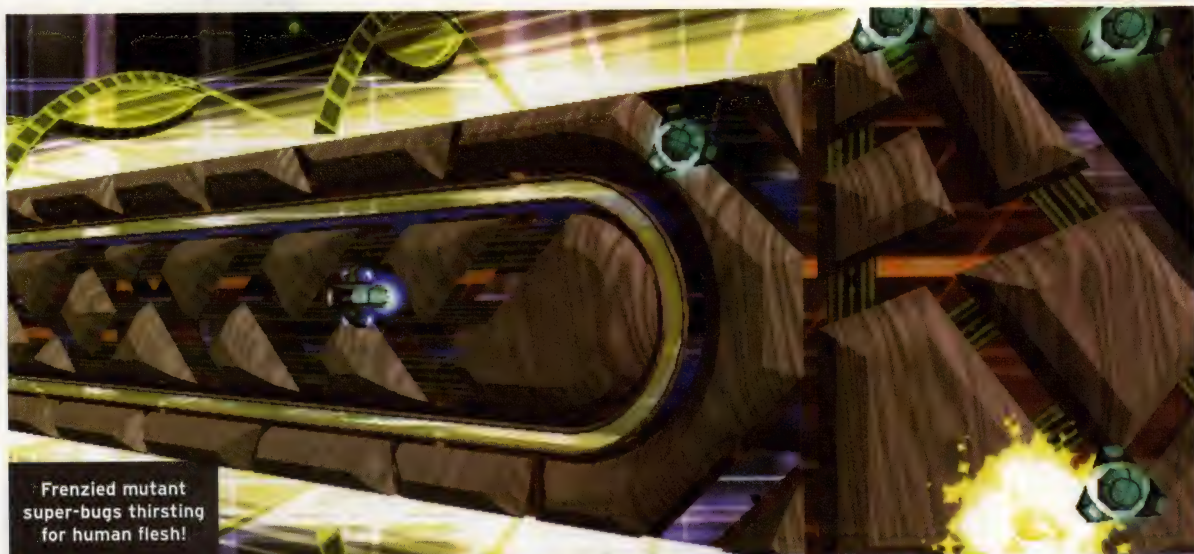
Frenzied mutant super-bugs thirsting for human flesh!

**PCPP**

**OVERALL**
*Tight, fast, hard and rewarding. A real winner*

**86%**
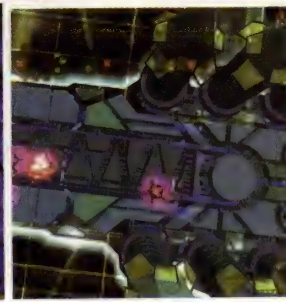
**W**e're not going to beat around the bush with this review. If you haven't played the demo on the coverdisc, play it now, and if you've played it, log on to www.pompom.org.uk and purchase the full game for a mere $24. It's as simple as that. Space Tripper is fun, furious, challenging, rewarding and the tightest piece of code we've seen here at PCPP for months.

The concept is simple. Take Defender , add Iridium and you have a game that harks back to the good old days of blast 'em action. As developer PomPom says "no story, no background, no plot and no friends."

Space Tripper's strength lies in its elegant simplicity. Each level is a small arena into which various enemies spawn, and the player controls a tiny ship with two modes of fire. The blue main laser can be used on tough single enemies while the red spreadshot can be used on hordes of weaker targets. And that's about it - simple, clean and very elegant.

There are four worlds in Space Tripper, and each world has three or four levels, so the game doesn't seem that long. Fortunately then, it treads the fine line between frustrating impossibility and rewarding achievement. Suffice it to say,

Space Tripper is a very difficult game, and if you can finish it even on Easy, consider yourself in possession of some 133+ old skool shooter skillz.

The graphics are so crisp they almost hurt. Pompom has shown in Space Tripper what really can be achieved with OpenGL. A realistic design philosophy has resulted in a game that is simply beautiful to play. Particle effects, lighting, bump-mapped environments, all these are applied to a classic shootin' paradigm and come out looking very impressive. The end of world bosses in particular look like they've stepped fresh from the ultra-clean lines of an Anime film - a classy Anime film, not a tentacle film.

Sure, it's just a simple shooter, and you'd hardly want to part with a huge wad of cash for a handful of levels and two fire modes. But Space Tripper is being distributed exclusively online by the developers (although a retail release is in the works) and the full version is a mere 12Mb download, feasible even on the crustiest of 56k modem connections.

The final proof in the Space Tripper pudding is that it is this game - not Operation Flashpoint, not Lord of Destruction nor Startopia - that has captured the undivided attentions of the PCPP crew. Play it and you'll love it, guaranteed.

**Anthony Fordham**

## WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

Each set of levels in Space Tripper has a unique combat model. The Training Grounds spawn little spinning tops which, if left too long, transform into deadly homing buzzsaws. Dread Noughts spawns endless miniature tanks until glowing generators are destroyed. Insect Infestation grows terrible fungoid towers that launch killer bugs. And the Temple of the Gods (right) has a model so difficult it makes John weep. While there are only a few different types of enemy on each level, they are so expertly realised that the gameplay experience is never short of thrilling and rewarding.

# GUNLOK

## Mighty machine men: mighty robots!

I could spend days, gazing across the baize at you...

**PCPP**

**FOR**
■ Stylish setting
■ Nice interface
■ Free mini-comic

**AGAINST**
■ Drab levels
■ Suss AI
■ Free mini-comic

**OVERALL**
*A hearty fix for
top-down strategy
fans*

# 81%
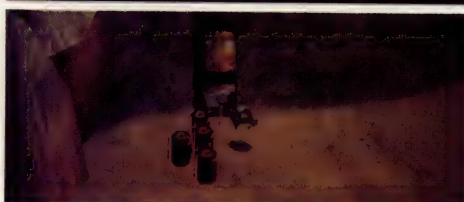
In the late 21st century, Mankind makes the understandable yet risky decision to replace human politicians with super-intelligent death robots. Sure enough, the planet is run more efficiently, but the near total extermination of humanity is the price you pay for reliable global government. With human resistance largely crushed, said robots have set about fulfilling their original corporate programming, to convert the entire surface of the Earth into a scrapyard full of rubble, sentry drones, and crates.

But it's not over yet; the last survivor of an elite commando force, together with his powered armour and hokey tree-hugging philosophy are ready to turn things around, like a record baby right round baby right round. That man is Gunlok.

## We are the robots

This is a top-down game of strategy and action, where 3D objects inhabit a 3D world. The camera can and must be controlled by the player to navigate the terrain, and whilst occasionally confusing the player when solid objects get in the way, such problems are minor and surmountable. There is an 'active pause' function where it's possible to change the view and give orders while freezing the action in its tracks. Together with the ability to set multiple objectives and way-points, this method of control is quite powerful.

It's important to remain aware, though, of certain pathing issues. For instance, if a large solid object stands between Gunlok and a target, he'll happily blast away all his ammo in vain. Hint: Always steer the in-game character so there's no confusion over what they're shooting at. The same goes for movement; sometimes they'll figure out how to get around corners, but to be on the safe side it helps to spell things out.

Escalating the complexity of your task are the robots that join you on your way; automatons with varying abilities so you can attack problems from different angles. Frend is a large, slow robot, a walking tank good for shooting things and drawing fire. Hark is a small, fast robot good for scouting terrain, fitting through small spaces, and drawing fire. Elint is a medium-sized, lanky robot that can haxor enemy defences, heal friendly units, and unnerve onlookers with its lopsided limp. And of course, draw fire.

## No! Bear... want... to LIVE!

Inventory functions are not so much extensive as exhaustive. If keeping track of all your near identical-looking items seems hard at first, just wait until you start running out of them. After providing an initial glimpse of freedom, Gunlok is quick to snatch the rug of ammo out from under you. If it looks like you can sneak past a foe, then it's probably necessary to do so.

### 2000 AD

In a novel cross-promotional move, Rebellion has bought out the cultural institution that is 2000AD comics. Now the developer not only has a propaganda organ to peddle its software every week, but also exclusive rights to make games based on all our favourite comic characters. A Judge Dredd game is already in production, and hopefully we'll see Rogue Trooper, Strontium Dogs and more on our PCs in the coming years. Fingers crossed: Splundig Vur Thrigg!

The setting is cool, the missions are varied, and the weaponry at your disposal is quite diverse. This is basically a cross between Syndicate Wars and The Two Faces of Tomorrow, with a bit of ABC Warriors thrown in. There's nothing really new in the game, but it's a solid production with explosions in all the right places, and it you won't have to submerge your box in liquid nitrogen to run it. You may want to give it a kick every now and then, though, just to let it know who's boss.

**James Cottee**

# X-COM ENFORCER

## In a rare moment away from Space Tripper we find a rough diamond

**HERO ENFORCER**

As Enforcer, you can use only one weapon at a time... you can also only CARRY one weapon at a time. This means that every time you run over a weapon, it is automatically selected. This is good because it lends variety but also some arcade-esque strategy. Don't want the shotgun? Well, you'll have avoid it then, won't you?

You got a Shotgun.

Gimme a kith... pleath?

**PCPP**

**OVERALL**
*A thtrong action experienth lacking depth*

**71%**

**T**hith ith not really an X-Com game, Enforther! Thith ith action, Enforther! Even arcade if you can remember when arcadeth weren't filled with dancing gameth, Enforther! Fire, Enforther! Don't lift your finger from the trigger, Enforther! Truly, you are ol' thchool, Enforther! Enforther, Enforther, ENFORTHER!

This is how X-Com: Enforcer sounds, complete with lisp. Your scientist creator comments constantly on the action and never fails to name you personally, Enforcer! This was painful at first, but the anguish abated just long enough for the pure high action joy of Enforcer to shine through.

### When I was a lad...
As Enforcer, a monotone alien-killing machine, you can shoot and run and jump... and not much else. You can turn and stuff in 3D but there's not a lot more to say. Shoot baddies, collect health, repeat. Sounds dull, doesn't it? And yet for some reason, I felt compelled to play on.

If old school means repetitive, simple fun then old school this is. The sheer speed of the game is startling, especially when so much of it seems (and at times looks) so budget. Using the Unreal engine, X-Com: Enforcer is really fast, in the same vein as

Serious Sam, if mostly on a smaller scale. At the same time, X-Com inspired visions of my first gaming experiences on humble home PC: Round 42, Alley Cat, Lode Runner. The only useful skill a player might need in the game is circle-strafing. The rest is knee-jerking. This is trigger happy country and the only tactic is picking up the power-ups and better weapons. Sorely missing is a high score table (ol' school multiplayer) but the bloodlines are clear. Arcade speed + arcade fury = X-Com: Enforcer.

### Old Schoooooooooool!!
Levels progress from the eyesore brown of canyons or something, to the concrete jungle of shopping centres and business districts, to graveyards and cornfields and then ever onward into the sunset. More enemies, more guns, more action, more everything - you beaut! Defeated aliens leave behind data points which are spent on new weapons and improvements (*Ah, the RPG bit - Ed*).

This is simple, simple gaming and it works so well. Getting behind the pulse rifle or Mass Driver and mowing down dozens of aliens is the meal of the day and it's hearty. In ol' school fashion, I hoped to finish the lot in one day. No such luck, I barely got through half of the 35 levels.

With a concerted effort, a good solid weekend of commitment is the most you would need to complete X-Com: Enforcer. However after that, the lifespan will diminish rapidly. Perhaps the newer breed of games work too well. In comparison, games like X-Com offer joy, but it's all too brief. Enforther!

**John Dewhurst**

# IN REVIEW

## The silicon state of the art

# TECH

**E**veryone's already got their GeForce3 right? You all went out and bought yours as soon as the first cards came into the country, didn't you? No of course you didn't, because up until the end of May the only GF3 cards in relatively plentiful supply were from Leadtek, and they all got snapped up faster than a snappy thing snapping up something really snapworthy.

The Hercules cards didn't come in until the beginning of June, and then it was only a shipment of 200 or so that had already all been pre-ordered through either select retailers or Guillemot itself. MSI have produced a GF3 card... but unfortunately they only seem to have produced one card, and as for the king of them all, the ASUS V8200, well good luck beating the mob to secure one of the few hundred in the country.

What's going on here? Has nVidia seriously misread the tides of supply and demand, thinking that no gamer in their right minds is going to pay $1000 for a videocard? Many of the retailers who are saying they can get a hold of GF3 cards are advertising them at prices as low as $899, but you'll still have to wait your turn.

It's clear that in today's exciting and modern gaming marketplace we ARE quite prepared to pay $1000 for a graphics card. The success of the GeForce2 Ultra is testament to that. But we've seen the GeForce3 now, and sure it improves framerates for today's games, but improving from 140fps to 180fps doesn't mean a great deal in practical terms.

I say hold off until a few titles that take advantage of the advanced properties of the GeForce3 actually appear on shelves. At the moment all the GF3 really does is let you watch the Nature game in 3DMark2001.

But in case you just HAVE to get yourself a GF3, we've taken a look at two of the potentially more available cards on page 96, in an attempt to say something definite about two cards that perform almost identically in synthetic tests. Oh well.

anthonyf@next.com.au

## THE PCPP TECH AWARDS SYSTEM

The Power Award is given to the highest performing product in each PowerTest. We don't take into account the cost of the component, or what extra functionality it might have. We just look for raw power.

The Value Award is given in the PowerTest each month to the product that offers the best balance between performance and cost. It also takes into account any extras that come with the product.

In our definitive Hotware reviews, any product deemed revolutionary, of exemplary value, or simply so cool it's a must-have, will receive a score above 90%, and the coveted PC PowerPlay Gold award.

## THE PCPP HOTWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

| 90+ | Excellent, Gold Award. A must buy. |
|-----|-----|
| 80-89 | Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance. |
| 60-79 | Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art. |
| 40-59 | Mediocre with little to recommend it. |
| 0-39 | A dog. Avoid. |
| | |
| Distributor | The local point of contact for the product. |
| Price | The RRP at the time of going to print. |
| URL | Where to find further relevant information. |

# DVDQA

DVDs. Suddenly, all the kids are buying them. It's never been easier for an obsessive host to bore captive guests with their favourite cinematic moments, and it's never been easier for studios to package their mass-produced tripe for home consumption. But believe it or not, DVDs are actually a good thing, and who better to tell you why then our resident video disc froot loop, **James Cottee**
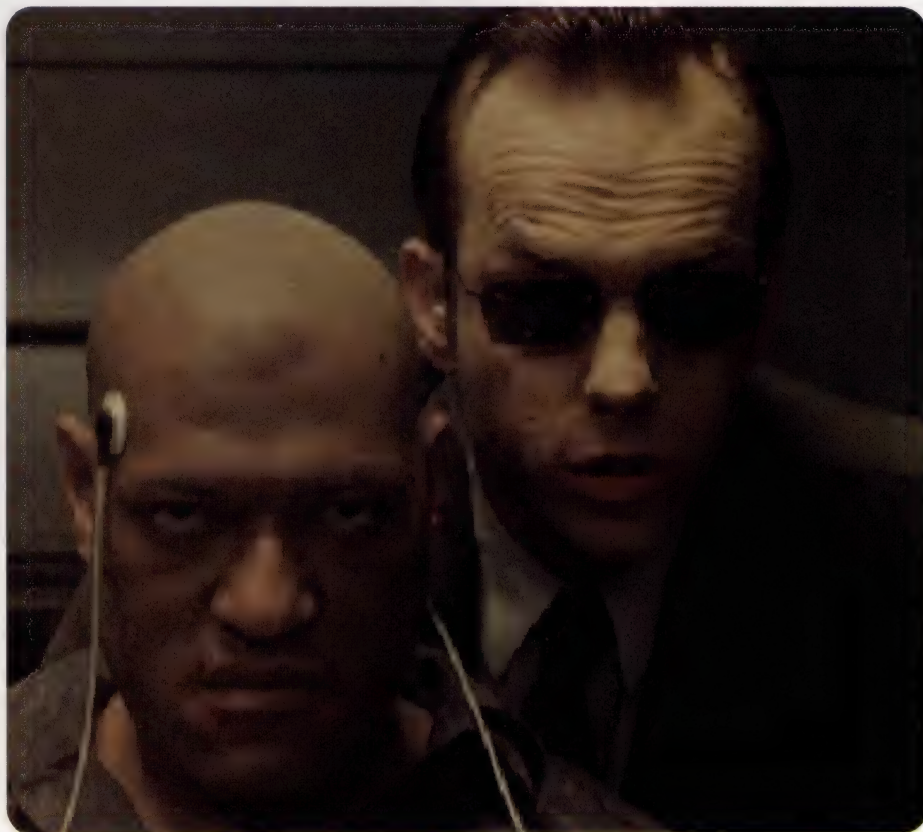
It may surprise you, but video discs have been around since the 50s. That's not a typo: the NINETEEN FIFTIES. The earliest models played vinyl records that would store about five minutes of grainy, monochrome footage in total silence. It's taken that last 50 years for video discs to evolve to the point where they're a viable home cinema solution. Sure, the 80s gave us laserdiscs, but they were monsters, expensive 12" bastards subject to data rot. But with the DVD price and convenience are on our side, and the glorious home cinema of tomorrow is here today.

The DVD is in many ways a contradiction. Designed to be the single universal format for home video sales and data storage alike, it has been split into incompatible regions and warring recordable formats. Intended to bowl over the public, it has raised questions over copyright, freedom of consumer choice and the risks of data compression. And despite the vast potential of the format, much of it has been squandered, sometimes by lack of vision, but mostly by greed.

Still, it's the finest quality home video format money can buy. More user-friendly than laserdisc, more compact than video, and more flexible than VCD. And it's digital, making it right at home in the modern PC, bringing all your favourite movies to the desktop. In the following pages we'll look at some of the options that exist for viewing DVDs, some of the better DVDs to watch, and of course the battery of technical concerns that follow the format around like a stray puppy that looks cute but carries a hideous fungal disease.

We hope at the end of this article you'll love Digital Versatile Disc as much as we do, if not more so.

Just three of the fine films you can watch on DVD. See if you can guess what they are. It's tricky.
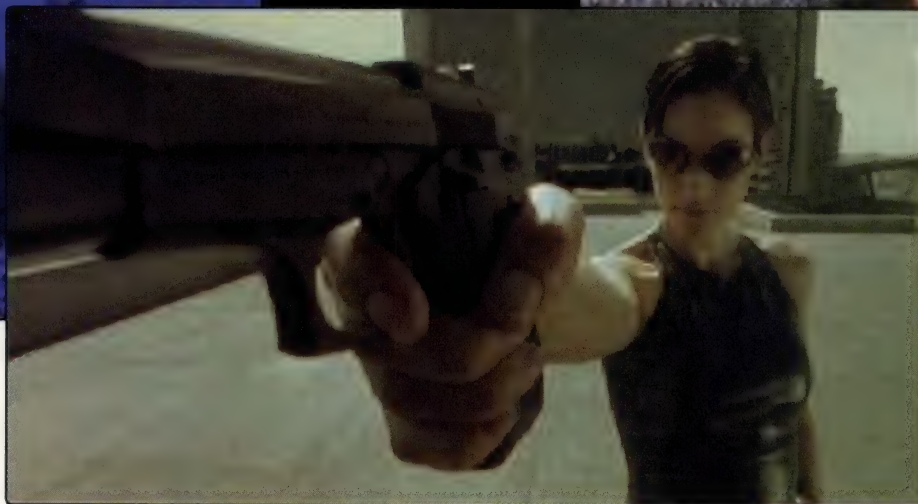
## What is DVD?

It stands for Digital Versatile Disc, and it's the latest and greatest optical disc format. Its physical dimensions are identical to a CD; 120 by 1.2 mm, with a 12 mm hole for the spindle. But it stores information at least four times as densely as a CD or CD-ROM, and can use some other tricks to pump its overall capacity to almost 16 gigabytes. The most significant is MPEG-2 compression, employed in all DVD videos. Despite the fact that MPEG-2 is a lossy compression format, reducing the data to about 1/28 its original size, like our old chum the JPEG when properly mastered the result can be indistinguishable from the original.

The strength of MPEG-2 is that unlike the MPEG-1 compression in all those VCDs in Chinatown, the amount of data streaming off the disc per second can be varied depending on what's happening on screen. VCDs suffer when lots of action and movement happen at once, but a DVD can just use more storage space to keep pace. 3.5 megabits per second, on average, is usually enough for home cinema needs, and 6 can eliminate the spectre of compression artifacts entirely.

The bog-standard DVD is "single sided, single layered" and holds 4.6 megabytes. Because of the unusual circumstances that surrounded the development of the format, there are three different ways to increase its capacity. In the early 90s the big electronics companies had formed two blocs, each with their own version of the future of home entertainment. Both groups realised a re-run of the VHS/Beta war would be

bad for everyone, so they combined their visions into the DVD format we know today.

As a result, a DVD can be "dual sided," "dual layered," or both. A dual sided disc stores 4.6 gigs on each side, and must be physically turned over to access the second side. Dual layer discs need only be read from the one side, as the pickup laser focuses at two different depths. This can result in a slight pause in movie playback, but is hardly noticeable. When the two techniques are combined a single DVD can hold up to 15.9 gigs, but there's no room on the disc surface to smack goofy pictures of Keanu Reeves, so it's a process seldom used.

## DVD on the PC?

There's nothing stopping you from watching DVD movies on your PC. Most new PCs are fitted with DVD-ROM drives, and even basic PC speaker packages these days are quite decent.

protectors. For more normal viewing habits, where you can relax on your sofa like a goddamn human being, cost effective options exist. The simplest and cheapest way is to just run cables from your sound and video cards up to your TV, and away you go.

For best results, one should employ a specialised DVD decoder card. You can request one when ordering a new PC, or install one in kit form. By not relying on the CPU this ensures smoother playback, and most cards will have dedicated circuitry for smoothing out the resulting video signal. Either way you shouldn't need to worry about getting any new drivers, as Windows 98 was produced with DVD in mind.

As for writable data DVDs, there are four competing formats which are not entirely compatible with each other (see DVD-RAM, overleaf). Considering that none of them has yet emerged as a clear market leader, and the

### a re-run of the VHS/Beta war would be bad for everyone, so visions were combined into the DVD format we know today

You needn't spend any extra on pricey home cinema gear, and between features you and your chums can compare your slide rules and pocket

blanks are expensive, even for DVD-R, it's unlikely that the ubiquitous CD-R will be displaced any time soon.

# PROS AND CONS
## IS DVD RIGHT FOR YOU?

## Advantages of DVD Video:

Random Access: Just like with CDs, you can jump to any part of the movie/TV show/grand final "virtuously instantaneously." This enables you to, for instance, watch the lobby gunfight in The Matrix over and over again without having to bother with the other parts of the movie.

Durability: It's a sad fact of life, but your video tapes will not last for ever. Even if the wear and tear from watching your favourite episodes of Bottom over and over again doesn't wear out the tape and strip off all the magnetic particles, eventually the Earth's magnetic field will render the tape as blank as a Murdoch's paycheck. DVDs, on the other hand, do not require physical contact to have their content extracted, nor does magnetism bother them. Like CDs, opinion varies as to how long they'll last; estimates vary from 50 years to when the Sun explodes.

Resolution: DVD video records about double the resolution of VHS, and certainly holds more detail than most TVs can reproduce. For the casual viewer this is a bonus, and for the home cinema fruitcake a necessity.

Sound: DVDs can easily handle full 5.1 Dolby surround sound. Some even support DTS. While not everyone feels the need to buy a full home cinema audio system, most will have a stereo of some kind, and increasingly these are being sold in five speaker configurations for those who want to dabble with surround sound. Again, it's better to have more audio resolution that you can handle.

Multiple Audio tracks: DVD movies can hold up to eight different audio tracks. The novelty of watching a given film in all the major European languages wears off eventually, but the feature has other uses. Commentary voice-overs from cast and crew are an excellent source of insights into the movie making process, and usually amusing anecdotes as well.
Multiple Camera Angles: A DVD can have up to 9 optional camera angles. So far this has been mostly been exploited by the porn industry, but there are probably other applications, such as sport.

Subtitles: Any DVD can have up to 32 different sets of subtitles. This doesn't just benefit obscure European ethnic groups, it also permits English for the hearing impaired-type messaging, like you get on teletext. And let's not forget anime purists who prefer to circumvent the execrable English voice acting usually associated with the genre.

Extra features: Don't forget all those extra goodies a DVD can hold thanks to its sophisticated menu functionality: Storyboards, animatics, "featurettes," ads, stills, and before and after shots of the TP the director wiped his arse with.

It's Digital: Despite the increasingly elaborate (and desperate) techniques being used to limit the ways you can use your $40 copy of Darkman 3, it's still encoded in digital form, and there are ways and means around the copy protection. Whether you want to use DeCSS to watch your movies under Linux, or make "backup copies" with DivX ;-), hackers around the globe are fighting a never-ending battle to expand your options. PC PowerPlay of course refuses to endorse any theft of intellectual property, and anyone who even thinks of ripping is very naughty indeed.

## Disadvantages of DVD Video:

Region coding: The ACCC may think it's an anti-competitive practice, but more importantly it's a colossal pain in the arse. Fortunately, cracks exist for most DVD-ROM setups, look for one that suits your own configuration online. Or if you're buying a stand-alone unit, make sure it's one where you can change the region, and not just an "all region" (region 0) player, as some new DVDs refuse to play on them. Why make such a big deal about region coding? Because there are stacks of quality region 1 and 2 titles that will never, ever see the light of day in Australia because it's not profitable to release them here. Then there's the matter of almost half the discs released in region 4 having significantly less special features than their northern hemisphere counterparts. The whole thing stinks: If the New Zealand government can take a stand on region coding, then why can't we?

You can't record: Well, strictly speaking, you can. The first home DVD-RW players are now entering the market. But you can expect to pay around $7000 for one, so you may want to hang onto that old VHS player for just a little longer.

Cost: Despite the inescapable fact that is costs less to manufacture a DVD than a video tape, whenever a film is released on both formats the former costs significantly more. The official line is that DVDs have more "value" than tapes, and when pressed into a corner, some PR hack might gibber something about the cost of the new plant that makes them being spread across new releases. Bollocks: DVDs cost a buck to make, and their price point is determined by psychological means; the threshold of pain, just like your phone and internet bills. Parallel importing may not directly cut DVD costs to the consumer, but the threat of its introduction might just scare local producers into smartening up their act. Warner Bros have led the way with cutting a slab of their range to $24.95, hopefully other distributors will follow suit.

Obsolescence and the march of time: Whether it becomes a fondly-remembered format like the 78 record, or a ridiculed white elephant like the 8-track, the truth is that DVDs won't be around forever. Maybe it will be cheap and reliable movies on demand in every home, or a new storage format that's ten times as good, but something will displace it, and you'll have to start collecting your classic hits all over again. It probably won't be for at least a decade, but the day will come...

Antisocial Behaviour: This new video format provides yet another lure to prevent obsessive types from ever leaving the house. Try to turn viewing them into a social activity, and for God's sake do something other than watch TV at least once a week.

So there you have it. Are DVDs worth buying? Certainly, if you can find what you want, and the chances of that get better every day. Should the buyer beware? Definitely, as not all DVDs are created equal. They may not be perfect, but standards are high, costs are coming down, and they're the best home video format that money can buy. Not only that, it comes on a silver platter.

# DVD ROM

Every gaming system should have two optical drives, it's as simple as that. A CD-writer for all your backup needs, and a DVD-ROM for all your other needs. Today's modern and exciting DVD-ROMs all work as 32x or even 40x CD-ROMs so all your optical data needs are amply cared for. Here are three DVD-ROMs we recommend as part of any complete system.

## PANASONIC SR-8586 B
**PRICE:** $180
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Panasonic
**URL:** www.panasonic.com.au

This 16x DVD-ROM is particularly interesting since it forms the spearhead of Panasonic's push for the dominance of DVD-RAM as the standard DVD recording medium (see DVD RAM opposite) with its ability to read Type 2 DVD-RAM. This makes for a very versatile drive, and useful for those of you who have already purchased the $7000+ DVD-RAM recorders. At 16x, and with a decent videocard, a hardware decoder is almost unnecessary for smooth, pleasurable DVD viewing.
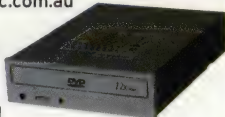
## MITSUBISHI 1640A
**PRICE:** $150
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Mitsubishi Electric
**URL:** www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au

Sold under the Diamond Data label this 16x DVD-ROM also reads DVD-R and DVD-RW discs, but not DVD-RAM. The drive has a peak transfer rate of 21.6Mb/sec which, when combined with a decent software DVD player such as Cyberlink's PowerDVD results in smooth action sequences in your favourite hi-octane movies. Of course, combined with a hardware decoder long luxurious panning shots are even smoother, almost like being there. Speaking of PowerDVD, the 1640A retail box comes with the latest version, as well as a PowerPlayer for MP3 playback. A worthy drive indeed.

## ACTIMA AD12S
**PRICE:** $108
**DISTRIBUTOR:** SATO Technologies
**URL:** www.actima.com.tw

Enough with the fancy 16x drives for the rich kids we hear you cry? You already own one of the very attractive DVD Players examined on the opposite page? If you need a basic DVD-ROM for data use and maybe the occasional episode of Thunderbirds, then this Actima 12x drive is more than ample. The peak transfer rate is 16.2Mb/sec as you'd expect from a 12x drive, and it can read CD-R and CD-RW discs no problem. The drive also reader DVD-R discs, for when this rewritable format inevitably becomes popular. This is a basic drive, so no software is included, although you will save up to $80 which you can use to buy a nice game, say Heist for example.
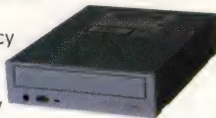
# TOP 10 DVD
Ten DVDs you simply *must* own. Now
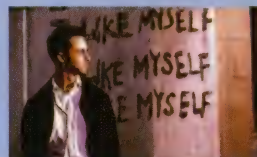
**Fight Club**
One of the first releases to get the two disc treatment, and thus with the highest possible levels of trivial extras for the obsessed fan. TV spots, photographs of merchandise, four different commentary tracks, but best of all you can freeze frame on the subliminal messages!

**Gladiator**
Another double disc juggernaut, this was *the* hot item for Christmas 2000! All the storyboards, interviews and docos you can cram into 7.95 gigs, but more significantly full DTS sound for the feature itself! Few DVDs feature this, despite literally hundreds of people buying home theatre systems.

**Rollerball**
Ignore that pesky remake, and go straight to the 1975 original that inspired one of the best ever episodes of The Goodies. Not as many features at the US release of this disc, but you still get the commentary in which director Norman Jewison tries to remember what the hell it was he was thinking, and why.

**The Matrix**
This was one of the first DVD releases to have "special features," and is also a good compatibility benchmark; many DVD players refuse to touch it! All the behind-the-scenes bullet time tomfoolery, and of course you can "take the red pill" for extra, extra extras! Spot your favourite Sydney locations!

**Blade Runner**
Aside from scene selection, this DVD of the director's cut has no special features whatsoever. But hell, this is Blade Runner, so it was always going to make the list. WB have finally stopped using those crappy cardboard cases on this one, and there's even a special edition rumoured for later this year!

**Dune**
When we think of Dune, we of course think of Sting in black plastic underpants, and perhaps the popular RTS. But there are so many other magical moments in this timeless classic that one should be able to re-live them over and over. Squat in the way of features, and still no director's cut, but at least it's DTS.

**Thunderbirds**
This year will see the complete run of this visionary series released locally on DVD. Plus of course the two theatrical movies: Thunderbirds Are GO and Thunderbird 6! Join Scott, Virgil, Alan, Gordon and John in the year 2065, where puppets wear fast-food uniforms and atomic power is king!

**Get Carter**
Noirish, stylish, moorish, British! Micahel Caine in his breakthrough performance as ruthless mob hitman Jack Carter. Amusing promotional materials from the 1971 launch, plus a superlative commentary track by all the key cast and crew. Like the trailer says: Get Carter, before Carter gets you!

**Run Lola Run**
Innovative narrative structure, stunning cinematography, pulsing music, superb acting, and a feature packed DVD to boot. The original German dialogue with subtitles is of course the best way to view it, but there's an amusing and informative commentary track by Tom Tykwer and Franka Potente too.

**Ghost in the Shell**
A must-have for any WaReZ d00d who considers themselves |33t, this feature tracks the adventures of cyborg cop Motoko Kusanagi in the year 2029. She may be able to rub out terrorists in her sleep, but is she any match for metaphysical mumbo-jumbo? Great sound & video reproduction plus a smattering of features.

# DVD RAM

## The War of the Formats heats up as **Michael Wu** keeps score

For a while now DVD rewritables have taunted and teased with the promise to revolutionise the way we store data. With the capability of storing 9.4GB of information on a single double-sided disk, the potential is enormous. But aside from the obvious benefits of the impressive data storage capabilities, there are major issues involving its implementation. None of which is more significant than the ongoing struggle to find an industry standard.

Currently, the two major formats competing in the consumer market are DVD-RAM and DVD+RW. DVD-RAM can somewhat be described as the grandfather of all DVD rewritable formats, as it was indeed the first to appear on the market having made its debut in mid-1998. Initially allowing 2.6GB for a single side, a year later version 2.0 hit the market with an increase storage capacity of 4.7GB per side. While the addition in storage space will indeed help woo customers, it's the compatibility issues that have impeded its progress. You see, the trademark plastic cartridges, similar to that of floppy disks, that enclose the DVD-RAM come in two flavours - Type 1 and Type 2. Single sided DVD-RAM come in Type 2 un-sealed cartridges which allows for the disk to be removed so it can be used in conjunction with a DVD-ROM. On the other hand, double-sided DVD-RAM are in sealed Type 1 cartridges making it physically incompatible with the DVD-ROM. While this may seem as an apparent disadvantage, it is argued that the protective cartridge ensures the rewritable media is reliable and secure. With the likes of

Panasonic, Toshiba, Mitsubishi and Hitachi backing the format, it is quite possible for DVD-RAM to gain market dominance.

The DVD+RW format led by Sony, Phillips and Hewlett-Packard has been a bit of a hit-and-miss affair. Due in 1999, the 3.0GB DVD+RW never made it onto the market. Instead version 1.0 was completely scrapped in favour of the larger capacity 4.7GB format which is due before the end of this year. Unlike the DVD-RAM, a protective cartridge is not essential making the DVD+RW format compatible with the majority of DVD-ROM drives and DVD-Video players.

As the long awaited DVD+RW is nearing its introduction date, from here, the battle of media rewritable supremacy is only going to heat up. At the moment CD rewritables are quite adequate for current data storage needs, it's unlikely we'll see DVD rewritables taking over anytime soon. However audiophiles, videophiles and businesses may find the added storage space invaluable. Though one thing is certain, it's not a matter of if but when the DVD rewritable is going to displace CD-RW as the popular choice for rewritable digital media. Hopefully when the time comes for the upgrade, we'll have reliable, fast, fully compatible and cost-effective solutions to choose from.

It's hard to see the two formats co-existing in this cutthroat dog-eat-dog world. Ultimately, the consumer will determine the superior rewritable format. Until that day comes, the battle will continue to rage on. These are exciting times for the rewritable media industry.

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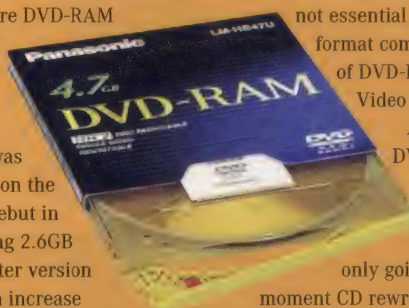
## WHY NOT GO MAD?
### SONY DVD DREAMSYSTEM DAV300

**PRICE:** $1699
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Sony
**URL:** www.sony.com.au

It's all very well to spend months shopping around, assembling your perfect home entertainment system component by painful component, spending $1700 on a pair of speakers here, $2300 on a pre-amplifier there, but what if you want a complete audio visual solution in one fell swoop? Something not only powerful, but stylish.

Something that won't clash with the furniture. Enter the aptly named DreamSystem from Sony. Basically, this setup is an amalgamation of all traditional AV components into a single package, and with a quality DVD player thrown in to boot. It's a combination DVD, CD player and AM/FM tuner with all kinds of digital bells and whistles including built-in Dolby 5.1 and DTS digital decoders and a T-class digital amplifier.

With five satellites and a subwoofer, the DreamSystem delivers sound that rivals many more expensive stand-alone components, and extra A/V inputs mean you can even run your PC through it for all your gaming needs. In fact, an optical input also means you can take advantage of 4 channel surround effects, so the DreamSystem really is everything you could possibly need.

It looks good in any room, it's silver and it's a total DVD solution for a relatively reasonable price. Check it out!

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## DVD PLAYERS

It's all very well to cuddle down in front of the PC with a bag of popcorn and a few choice films, but nothing beats relaxing on your couch, in your living room, watching a big-arse TV. Since all set-top DVD players contain hardware decoders, their motion is much smoother than DVD playback on even the fastest of PCs. Here's a triage of players we find worthy.

### SONY SLIMLINE DVPS336
**PRICE:** $649
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Sony
**URL:** www.sony.com.au

They say that good things come in small silver packages, and this elegant player is sure to impress members of the opposite sex even more than your extensive collection of Thunderbirds and Evangelion discs. It features audio outputs for a separate subwoofer, as well as optical out for a set of 5.1 channel speakers such as the excellent Videologic DigiTheatre DTS. Those of you with small children or flatmates with impressionable minds might also appreciate the 50-disc parental lock, which at the very least can prevent members of your household from watching Titanic for the nine thousandth bloody time.

### LG 5 DISC CHANGER
**PRICE:** $979
**DISTRIBUTOR:** LG Electronics
**URL:** www.lge.com.au

What's better than watching a whole movie without getting out of your chair? Watching FIVE movies without getting out of your chair, that's what. With this five-disc changer, you need never walk again. This player from LG is admittedly quite chunky, but such a complete home visual and audio entertainment package has a right to be. It plays not only DVDs but also Video CD and plain old audio CD, supports all major digital audio formats, has optical and composite video out, and according to LG, also comes in a full colour carton box! Amazing.

### PANASONIC DVD-RV40A
**PRICE:** $896
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Panasonic
**URL:** www.panasonic.com.au

Another from the slimline school of DVD design this funky little unit will look simply spiffing underneath your 86cm Sony Wega TV and in the same room as your La Pavone Espresso Maker. One particularly standout feature of the RV40A is the dialogue enhancer, so you can now really appreciate all the mumbly bits in Godfathers I and II. The usual plethora of inputs and outputs is included, not the least of which is composite video for DVD purists. Like most of today's players, the RV40A also plays back Video CD and Audio CD, should you find that the big stereo is being hogged by a Human Nature fan.

# GEFORCE 3 SHOWDOWN

## LEADTEK AND ASUS GO HEAD-TO-HEAD IN THE RACE FOR FASTEST GF3 WHILE **JACK KULYK** ADJUDICATES

It seems like months ago that the GeForce3 was first announced and we got our hands on a few pre-engineering samples... hang on it <was> months ago, way back in PCPP#60. Three months later, and where are all the GeForce3 cards clogging both the shelves and our mighty machines? Various problems have afflicted the GeForce3, including an initial shortage of chips, then reticence on nVidia's part to release official drivers, and then various major manufacturers (Creative for instance)

saying they would not immediately bring out a GeForce3-based card. Oh yeah, and the ridiculous price. As you read this, cards should now be readily available from ASUS, Leadtek and Hercules, and it is from the two former manufacturers that we draw our PCPP Showdown contestants today.

In the GeForce2 Ultra game both ASUS and Leadtek were overshadowed by excellent offerings from Hercules, a company that swept up all the awards in its unstoppable path. However, as you can see from the benchmark

results below, the Hercules Prophet III Ultra has at last been edged out, replaced by the superior ASUS card.

It's true that there's not much in it, and all these cards retail for pretty mcuh the same price. The balance of power may shift again in the coming months as companies drop their prices further. But with each card performing well in both tests and real world gaming, your choice of GF3 can only be determined by added extras and overclocking potential. Bring on the revolution (*Huh? - Ed*).

## LEADTEK WINFAST GEFORCE3

This GeForce3 follows the reference board from nVidia almost to the letter, just like ASUS, using the big chunky aluminium heatsink with two strips glued directly onto the RAM since the reference board doesn't allow for the springs seen in the GeForce2 boards.

The RAM is rated at 4ns, but a bit of research and investigation revealed the RAM to actually underclocked 3.8ns RAM. Apart from creating a more stable board for Leadtek, this allows 133+ overclockers even more headroom to wring the very last ounce of speed out of their very expensive card.

Benchmarks speak for themselves, but it should also be noted that this card includes both DVI and TV out, although text was very difficult to read on a 38" Sony TV. However, once again, 'officially' this card only supports TV out to 800x600, but we were able to force the poor thing to perform at 1024x768 which, on a 38" screen, is very sweet for games indeed. Were it not for the ASUS card's superior
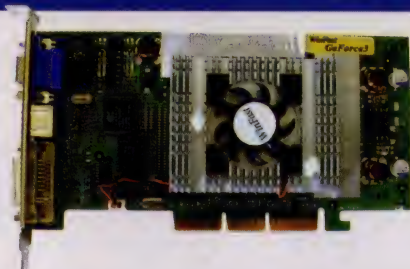
overclocking ability, and the fact that ASUS is selling a deluxe model with Philips VIVO for a slightly lower price, this Leadtek card would have emerged the victor. As it is, it runs a very close second.

### PCPP

| | |
|---|---|
| DISTRIBUTOR | BCN Technology |
| PRICE | $1095 |
| URL | www.bcntech.com |

**89**

### BENCHMARKS

**TEST MACHINE** Athlon-C 1.2GHz, ASUS A&V133, 256Mb SDRAM, 40Gb Seagate Barracuda ATAIII, Gametheater XP

**QUAKE 3 ARENA** 1280x1024x32 bit colour

| | |
|---|---|
| ASUS | 92.3 |
| LEADTEK | 91.9 |

**3DMark2001** 1024x768x32 bit colour

| | |
|---|---|
| ASUS | 5745 |
| LEADTEK | 5731 |

## ASUS V8200 DELUXE

The price quoted here is an official price from distributors Achieva, but a little bargain hunting should find this card for as 'little' as $990. The benchmark results here today are so close as to be presumed identical, although repeated tests consistently showed the ASUS slightly ahead of the Leadtek card.

Also using 3.8ns RAM underclocked at 4ns, the V8200 showed exemplary overclocking performance; we were able to push the card to 240/270MHz without any specialised cooling, which we attribute to the superior memory heatsinks.

Like the Deluxe GeForce2 model, the V7100, the V8200 uses a Philips VIVO (video in video out) unit to provide TV out connectivity. The TV out performance at 800x600 was certainly markedly superior to Leadtek's offering, however we were unable to make the card run at 1024x768 as the Leadtek was able to do.

This Deluxe box set also comes with the usual stuff found in ASUS Deluxe kits, including a set of headache-inducing 3D glasses that work only if
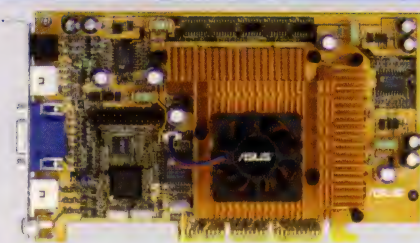
your monitor is capable of displaying at 100Hz. Still with a tiny edge in performance, overclocking and TV out performance, the ASUS V8200 is currently our high-end videocard of choice... just.

### PCPP

| | |
|---|---|
| DISTRIBUTOR | Achieva |
| PRICE | $1050 |
| URL | www.achieva.com.au |

**90**

### BENCHMARKS

**TEST MACHINE** Athlon-C 1.2GHz, ASUS A&V133, 256Mb SDRAM, 40Gb Seagate Barracuda ATAIII, Gametheater XP

**QUAKE 3 ARENA** 1280x1024x32 bit colour

| | |
|---|---|
| ASUS | 92.3 |
| LEADTEK | 91.9 |

**3DMark2001** 1024x768x32 bit colour

| | |
|---|---|
| ASUS | 5745 |
| LEADTEK | 5731 |

PC PowerPlay GOLD AWARD

# MIB

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## Warning! It is illegal to copy PS CD's

## ABIT
# KT7E MOTHERBOARD

**DISTRIBUTOR** Abit **PRICE** $270.00 **URL** www.abit.com.tw

When we first received this nifty blue motherboard direct from the big factories in Taiwan, we weren't quite sure what to make of it. The KT7E uses the KT133E chipset, which falls somewhere between the near-obsolete KT133 and the preferred but expensive KT133A. What we found after exhaustive testing was that the KT7E is a very versatile board positioned at a very attractive price.

Back in the good old days of the Intel 440BX, motherboards cost around $250 and the KT7E returns us to this golden era. The board is similar to the KT7A, apart from the cheaper chipset, and also dispenses with the onboard RAID controller and thus extra IDE ports. This is definitely a board for those of you with smaller cases or who have no interest in RAID or multiple physical hard drives.

The KT133E chipset is similar in performance to the KT133A, but officially only supports a Front Side Bus of 100MHz. However, the board does support the new 133Mhz FSB Athlons, and the BIOS gives access to both FSB and multiplier adjustments - presuming you have an unlocked CPU of course. However, we found during our overclocking tests that the board was quite up to running at 133MHz FSB, so in practice it matches the more expensive KT133A-based boards.

Oddly enough, many other manufacturers we contacted had either no knowledge or no interest in this chipset, thinking there won't be a market for it.

Active cooling on the northbridge allowed us to run a new 1.2GHz Athlon C at 1.4GHz using no specialised cooling other than a Thermoengine, and our Duron 850MHz managed a very respectable (if somewhat steamy) 1GHz.

The board features six PCI slots, so there's lots of room for expansion, and there's even a shared ISA slot for those of you with older professional soundcards or other crazy componentry. Three SDRAM slots support up to 1.5Gb of SDRAM memory for folks who don't have the cash or the desire to move to a DDR platform.

The ABIT KT7E is an excellent and attractively priced board suitable for overclockers and traditionalists alike. It's stable enough for polite society, and offers enough tweaking potential for even the hardest of the hard kore.

**Anthony Fordham**

**PCPP**

Cheap and versatile, the KT7E is well suited to tweakers and obsessive collectors of natty blue stuff

**91**

## SEAGATE
# CHEETAH 73LP

**DISTRIBUTOR** Seagate **URL** www.seagate.com

Seagate seems determined to stay a couple of steps ahead of its competition with this latest update to its well developed and highly respected Cheetah range of drives. Very simply, this is the most amazing SCSI-based drive we've seen in the PCPP Tech Bunker to date.

The 73LP has a number of iterations and it can be quite confusing determining exactly which one you've bought by looking at the drive itself. Basically there are three main models; an Ultra 160 SCSI model, an Ultra 160 model with 16Mb of cache, and a 200Gbs Fibrechannel, which is fantastically expensive and so specialised that it's only really useful for high end servers and big data streaming operations.

Which is where the 73Gb Cheetah 73LP is aimed; at servers. With a 10,000rpm spindle speed, 2.99msec latency and an average seek time of 4.9msec, the 73LP is certainly impressive on paper. Formatted transfer rates are a very impressive 38.4 - 63.9Mb/sec so waiting around is not something you have to do with this drive.

What was particularly impressive about the 73LP however was its silence. This is one of the quietest drives we've ever heard. Sure, in these modern and exciting days of Kanie Hedgehogs and WBK38s, the noise from your HDD is hardly of pressing concern, but if it wasn't for the little flashing IDE light, we wouldn't have realised the 73LP was even spinning.

At 73Gb, this amount of storage should keep you going for literally years, and this level of performance should enhance everything from game loading times to video playback framerates and more. In fact, our Warcraft III trailer playback tests showed the speed of the HDD to be a real factor in choppy video on a high end system such as our ASUS A7V133-based Athlon-C 1200. Suffice it to say; with the Cheetah 73LP under the bonnet, it's smooth sailing all the way.

The final feather in Seagate's cap is that the Cheetah 73LP is the most reliable drive in the business, with error rates so low they are negligible. Anyone series about SCSI and extreme storage should consider the 73LP.

**Anthony Fordham**

**PCPP**

Superior performance, but Ultra160 SCSI keeps the cost high. But for this... who cares!

**87**

## ALTEC LANSING
# ATP5 4.1 SPEAKER SYSTEM

**DISTRIBUTOR** Innovision **PRICE** $299.00 **URL** www.alteclansing.com

Altec Lansing have produced some of the best, low price speaker systems on the market. The minimal twin speakers on the desk in front of me are a testament to their good work. In the ATP5 speaker system, they are aiming for the low-price, purely gaming market. The 4.1 configuration features two front speakers, two rear speakers and a sub-woofer.

The right satellite features the control panel, with the ability to adjust volume, levels in the bass, treble as well as adjusting levels between speakers and treble/bass response. To the sub-woofer: This is a heavy unit which is a good sign. The bass tone is fair but frequently, frequencies that you'd expect of the sub-woofer are produced in the satellites. It just ain't the same when the gut-wrenching low sounds come from your desk and not under it. Balancing of the satellites and the subwoofer was essential for the system to respond well. That done, the ATP5 proved powerful and versatile.

Action gaming enjoyed the positional accuracy of the satellites. The treble is usually looked after well in these types of systems while the bass suffers. The treble is very good and the power wasn't lacking generally from the subwoofer or satellites. The mid and lower ranges are adjustable from the right satellite control panel. In hardware terms, adjustment of the speaker configuration is very functional. For systems of this calibre, the ATP5 sounds very good indeed.

The documentation is adequate, if not particularly illuminating in regard to more involved adjustments. The fact that different configurations can't be saved is disappointing, since the difference in the three modes available: Stereo, Stereo x2 and Gaming, is in channel orientation only. Stereo places the front outputs through the front two satellites and the subwoofer, Stereo x2 places them through all five speakers, Gaming uses front and rear outputs in all speakers. Finally, the lack of a headphone jack is puzzling.

At only $100 more than the Creative Slim 500 speakers reviewed last month, these speakers provide strong competition, especially with two extra channels. A strong system that requires a certain amount of fiddling to shine. A fair buy at around $400 and certainly adequate for general games and music usage.

**John Dewhurst**

**PCPP**
Good option in the games sound range, ATP 5 lacks some functionality but makes up for this in its strong general sound.

**82**

## ATI
# RADEON VE

**DISTRIBUTOR** Servex **PRICE** $369 **URL** www.ati.com.tw

The Radeon VE is clearly aimed at the budget market and ATI gets this message across bluntly through the removal of one of two rendering pipelines found in the original Radeon. This has considerable impact on the card's fillrate and rendering capabilities. Another blow is ATI's decision to include a 64-bit memory bus rather than the original 128-bit bus. The inferior memory bus effectively wipes out any advantage that would have been gained from the use of DDR memory. Finally, the Transform and Lighting engine (the much loved Charisma Engine) has also been discarded making the VE seem like the crippled member of the Radeon family.

Enough of the putdowns, as the Radeon VE is far from mediocre. Its bells and whistles - particularly the dual monitor support - deserve a good old rant. Included with the card along with the standard VGA port are a DVI-I port and a S-Video out for the multi-monitor support. The DVI-I port can be easily transformed into a standard VGA output with a converter provided. After installing all the relevant drivers and software, setting up the multi-monitor functions is a breeze. Just place two monitors beside each other, on top of each other, in a diagonal configuration or any combination in between; play around with the display properties so it suits your setup and you're done. Drag an icon out of your primary display and it will appear on your secondary monitor. With the Radeon VE, new and exciting ways of using your PC are opened before you. A spreadsheet won't fit on one monitor? But it might fit on two! Go about your work on one monitor while entertain your children/siblings with a DVD movie on the TV! Write your programming/HTML code on one, and display the output on the other! As you can see, just like the big man himself, I'm excited!

As in typical Radeon fashion, the Radeon VE takes a minimal performance hit when moving from 16 to 32-bit colour. On a Duron 700 system, the score returned by 3DMARK 2000 in 1024(768(32-bit colour is a competent 2713, only 133 points behind its 16-bit colour score. This compared to the scores for the Geforce2 MX, 3138 and 4326 respectively, the Radeon VE remains competitive in 32-bit colour. Radeon users have no reason to use 16-bit colour, as the performance gain is minimal.

**Michael Wu**

**PCPP**

Adequate 3D performance and 32bit performance but it's the dual monitor functions that really shine. **79**

## MICROSOFT
# TRACKBALL EXPLORER

**DISTRIBUTOR** Microsoft **PRICE** $159.95 **URL** microsoft.com/hardware

The trackball has been the neglected cousin of the mouse for many years, mostly due to the community's lack of familiarity with this type of device. Pity, since the design of a trackball is actually superior to a mouse. Less movement means less wear-&-tear. Less desk space and movement is required for operation because the unit remains stationary.

Physiology tells us that smaller muscle groups are more agile, more accurate and move faster than larger ones. In principle, directing a cursor with the fingers rather than the entire arm will be more efficient. High efficiency is a concern for every PC user but is paramount for gamers who enjoy UT and Quake.

The right hand falls over the Trackball Explorer, with the index and middle fingers used to move the ball. The standard mouse system of left click, mouse wheel, right click is maintained under the thumb. The two buttons under the pinky and ring finger are customisable function options, useful for forward/back in Internet navigation or any other command.

Like the Microsoft IntelliMouse, the Trackball Explorer uses an optical sensor and a digital signal processor (DSP). The sensor references the surface of the ball at a rate of 20,000 images per second. This image correlation processing results in smooth accurate response on screen. The model is a USB device and runs on Mac as well as PC.

First we tested the Trackball Explorer for general uses such as web browsing and found it responsive and easy to use. The learning curve is fair to moderate but within a week, control was very good. Then we tried Deus Ex. An immediate benefit of the trackball was the absolute freedom offered with very little movement of the hand (or fingers as the case may be). Precision and control in a 3D world is far superior to that of a mouse - this is definitely the future in gaming.

Ultimately it's the learning curve and perhaps the price that will ward off potential users. In the Trackball Explorer, Microsoft delivers a powerful trackball, functional enough to replace the age-old mouse. Well worth a look.

**John Dewhurst**

**PCPP**

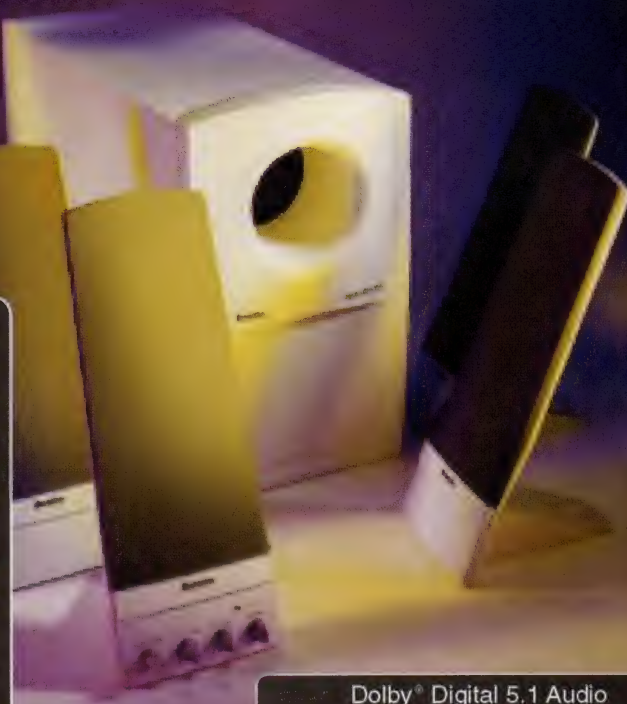Let the new battle lines be drawn: mouse versus trackball. There can be only one victor... **87**

# Boston

# THE BEAST

## THE ULTIMATE RIG

Now, word has it a lot of you are out there whinging for some kind of budget beast, a pitiful, sub-$3000 machine that may look good in favourable light with a stiff tailwind but in reality has no chance to impress the opposite sex. This is the PCPP Beast, folks, the most powerful gaming rig sensible money can buy, built for speed, endurance and with a healthy dose of Feng-Shui. Don't dis the Beast people. Bad things happen to blasphemers.

### Pioneer 16xDVD ROM & H'ware Decoder

| DISTRIBUTOR | Pioneer |
| --- | --- |
| PRICE | $549 |
| URL | www.pioneeraus.com.au |

Pioneer's excellent drive will take care of all your DVD movie needs. Whether it's the calm introspection of Kriztoff Kieslowski's Three Colours: White or the non-stop gore-fest of Peter Jackson's Braindead, your viewing pleasure will remain uninterrupted by glitch, skip or irritating load-time. You also get a tasty Videologic hardware decoder for the smoothest possible shave... er... movie, and a bunch of Video Ezy vouchers.

### TDK VeloCD 16x Burner

| DISTRIBUTOR | TDK 1800 651 917 |
| --- | --- |
| PRICE | $599 |
| URL | www.tdk.com.au |

At last the mighty Yamaha has been toppled by this admittedly ugly duckling. With a brutish 16x burn rate, the TDK VeloCD makes duplicating a brace of Bros simplicity itself, and the inclusion of BURN Proof technology - a feature sorely lacking on the Yamaha - ensures not one of those valuable CDs will go to waste. Works best with Black CD 16x Media from CAPAX (02 9648 4977) which not only look the business, but are black. Black good.

### AMD Athlon 1.33 GHz

| DISTRIBUTOR | AMD Australia |
| --- | --- |
| PRICE | $649 |
| URL | www.amd.com |

This blazing processor has the most advanced floating point unit in the world, 256k of integrated full speed L2 cache and a 200Mhz EV6 Front Side Bus. Which equals FAST. Never wait for Outlook to load again, ever. Do six things at once. Go mad, play Giants on the highest detail setting at 1600 x 1200. This thing is so powerful it's bad for you, guaranteed.
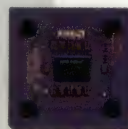
### ASUS A7M266

| DISTRIBUTOR | Achieva 02 9742 3288 |
| --- | --- |
| PRICE | $415 |
| URL | www.asus.com.tw |

The first Athlon motherboard supporting Double Data Rate DRAM, the A7M kicked twelve kinds of Bass Avenger out of our KT133 ATV board here at PCPP. As with all ASUS components, the A7M comes loaded with extras; an AGP Pro slot for professional graphics cards, 4 DDR RAM expansion slots for memory, ATA/100 support and a host of overclocking features.
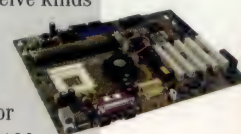
## Hercules Gametheater XP

**DISTRIBUTOR** Guillemot 02 8303 1818
**PRICE** $329
**URL** www.hercules.com

At last the SB Live! has been toppled. The Gametheater sounds just as good, looks ten times better, and has a fat PCI cable to make the Beast look really serious.

The rack also has four USB ports, making it a great multi-purpose hub for joysticks, digital cameras, webcams, racing wheels... hell, anything you could possibly think of. Stylish and functional. What ever will they come up with next?
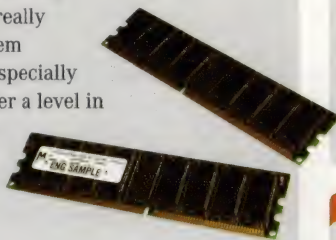
## Boston Acoustics Digital Theater 6000

**DISTRIBUTOR** Hi Fi & Video Marketing 02 9319 6877
**PRICE** $1399
**URL** www.bostonacoustics.com

WARNING: ensure bowel is empty before using this speaker setup. The DT6000 is so powerful it contravenes several building ordinances, and violates no less than four separate paragraphs in the Geneva Convention. Five channel surround, funky remote and optical in make this THE choice for people who can't take the pain from its oughta-be-illegal bigger brother, the DT7000.

## LianLi PC-60

**DISTRIBUTOR** Aust. PC Accessories 03 9763 8200
**PRICE** $400
**URL** www.opca.net.au

A stunner. All aluminium and built to withstand a direct nuclear strike in the megaton range. As we have mentioned more than once, we even dropped this case down a flight of concrete steps and it barely flinched. Ten bays keep everything snug, three extra fans keep it cool, and slide-off covers and a motherboard tray mean it's ready for upgrade action any time.

## 256Mb DDR DRAM

**DISTRIBUTOR** Kingmax 02 9648 4658
**PRICE** $799
**URL** www.kingmax.com

Once you go to 256Mb you'll never look back. You'll wonder how you ever survived with a miserable eighth of a gigabyte. This RAM is phenomenally expensive, but runs at a Double Data Rate, a blistering 266MHz. This really pumps up system performance, especially while you render a level in Q3Radiant and kick Thresh's buttocks in Quake3 at the same time.

## Seagate Cheetah X15 18Gb

**DISTRIBUTOR** Agate Technology 02 9870 3600
**PRICE** $1191
**URL** www.seagate.com

It's not huge, but it's the fastest hard disk on the block, consistently pulverising the competition into small, vaguely circular lumps. The X15 runs at a stupidly fast 15,000rpm and has 4Mb of cache. It's only 18Gb, but two or even three of these would allow you to save every thirty seconds in Deus Ex. Amazing.

## Hercules 3D Prophet III

**DISTRIBUTOR** Guillemot 02 8303 1818
**PRICE** $1199
**URL** www.hercules.com

The GeForce2 is dead. Long live the GeForce3. With its programmable pixel shader technology, 64Mb of really, really fast RAM, the fattest heat sinks in Christendom and the ability to bend an Ultra over its knee and spank it like a red-headed stepchild, the Prophet III is the new King of the Kards, and deservedly so.
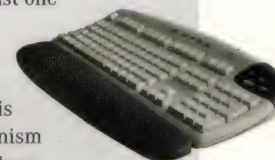
## Microsoft Intellimouse Optical

**DISTRIBUTOR** Microsoft 132058
**PRICE** $89
**URL** www.microsoft.com.au

While the big silver Intellimouse Explorer certainly looks nice, we find the key word here is big. It's too big. But this little fellow is just right. An optical sensor means you'll never have to scrape that revolting black gunk off the inside ever again, and a USB connection means your lightning reflexes will now be fairly reflected in your next game of Tribes 2.

## Philips 201P 21 Inch Monitor

**DISTRIBUTOR** Philips Australia
**PRICE** $2259
**URL** www.philips.com.au

We mourn the FD Trinitron here in the PCPP Tech Bunker, for its reign has ended. In its place comes a new overlord, a 21" Monitor of such beauty, such crystal clearness, such elegant style, such a good price and such a short picture tube that it can fit into the most modest of student bedrooms. Love it tenderly, and it will treat you, as they say, grouse.

## Logitech Cordless Freedom Navigator

**DISTRIBUTOR** Logitech 02 9972 3711
**PRICE** $219
**URL** www.logitech.com

Unchain your heart! Or at least unchain your keyboard. With all the kit the Beast includes, you'll end up with a huge ugly snarl of cables behind your desk. The Cordless Freedom Navigator eliminates at least one potential deathtrap (use your imagination) and the soft-as-silk keys make typing a 40,000 word thesis on Post-Structuralist Feminism an absolute breeze. First class honours every time! Also good for Quake3.

## TOTAL BEAST VALUE

# $9999

# SETUP

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS** — **MATT OVERINGTON WAXES TECHNICAL**

**Q** I just wanted to ask you, I saw a Graphics accelerator card at Electronics Boutique and it was a Phoenix RIVA TNT accelerator. So, I was wondering what would that be equivalent to? A normal TNT 3d card or a TNT 2? Or is it completely a different 3d card all by itself? I am currently running a Celeron 266Mhz with 128 MB RAM and a 15" Monitor.And have like a 8Megabyte Video card(not too sure, could be a 4Meg one)But I am ableto run StarSiege Tribes with no problems at all, but the Graphic detail is just a bit low on my system.I was wondering if I got the RIVA TNT 3D graphics Accelerator card, would it make much of a difference.If not what do you recommend I get? A decent card say just below $150?

**Shaun Chua**

**A** Without knowing more details about the card, we would assume that it is an original TNT card - not a TNT2. For your budget, you can almost get a GeForce 2 MX card (they are around now for about $160), but if you can't quite stretch it that far, a TNT2 card would suit you quite well. You can pick them up from computer fairs and online hardware vendors for less that $100 for a 32MB card.

**Q** I am a not so proud owner of a Pentium II 333mHz sitting on a "GA-686LX4 PCI-ISA BUS" (that's what is written on the top of my manual) motherboard. I have been reading your mag for some time now and a lot of overclocking questions have got me rather interested.
In my motherboard manual it has dip switch and jumper settings for different speed processors (PII 200 - 366). If I change my current PII 333 settings to the settings of the PII 366 (not a big improvement, I know), would my 333 now run at 366?

**Phillip Sabolta**

**A** Yes, that's absolutely true. Your switch controls the speed settings for the CPU, and speeding up the running of the chip is easily done. It's relatively straightforward to do it, just bear in mind that this will void warranties and also cause your computer to run considerably hotter. Beef up your cooling systems, and be prepared for a short period of system instability while you are testing out optimum speeds.

**Q** I have an ongoing problem with video drivers. Every time I come accross a new version of DirectX I install it with great enthusiasm and due to the fact that video drivers are lucky to be updated once a year, I end up with non-certified drivers.
I am running a Voodoo2 pci card and a SIS530 onboard both with DX7 drivers. Yet I have DX8 installed on my computer. I was wondering if it is worth my time formatting my hard drive and installing an older version of DirectX that suits my video drivers. Would this make any difference to the performance of the cards and game quality?

**Daniel Badke**

**A** If your card works alright under DX8, and you can get visual effects from most games, we would suggest keeping it on there - despite the fact that it is running with non-certified drivers. The extra features of DX8 outweigh those of DX7, and provided that you haven't experienced a drop in performance, we see no real need to go back to version 7. Occasionally some cards don't work too well with newer direct x revisions though, and it might be worth doing some testing in games to see if your refresh rates have suffered.

**Q** I have an Aptiva E3Q which is nearly 2 and a half years old and it is really messed up and I need your help. The OS is Win98, an AMD K6-2 300 MHz, 48MB SyncDRAM (thats what it sez on the box), and 8 GB harddrive which was 4GB when first bought, ATI rage pro turbo 2X with 4MB of memory, 40X CD-Rom and a lucent win modem(56k). The problem is that regularly at startup, on the Win98 screen the harddrive makes a really annoying ticking noise and does not proceed further than the Win98 screen at startup until about 10 minutes, when it says "error reading drive C". The first time this happend we took it down to Harvey Norman (where we bought it) and they gave us a new harddrive and a month later we got another new harddrive because of the same problem. The third time i was told it was a software problem and i used the Aptiva Recovery & Diagnostics CD to take everything off and put the original software back on which solves the problem for about 1-2 weeks (sometimes even just 1 day) and i have to re-do this process again, losing documents and having to re-install programs. It has happend about 25 times in the past 5 months. Please give me some advice or solutions.

**Troy Fleming**

**A** There are a few possible reasons that your computer could be doing this, but it sounds suspiciously like a problem with your power supply or motherboard to us. The crackling that you heard is coming from sparks jumping across a short circuit somewhere in your system. When you turn your computer on do you occasionally get a smell of ozone from the back of the machine? If so, there's a good chance that there's a faulty connection within your power supply. If the computer is not fed a supply of electricity at a constant voltage and current, then it will lock up (at various stages of booting or operation). It sounds as if the hard disk is not being provided a steady flow of current either and although it is more robust than the CPU, it is having enough problems that it is making a 'ticking' noise.
Chances are that it is not software related, and it sounds as if Harvey Norman is passing the buck. I'd say it is not still under warranty, but if you can find a good hardware vendor that is willing to try a new power supply in it for you, we'd suggest taking it in and getting it swapped. A power supply should run about $50 or so.
Another possible source of the fault is an overheating CPU - make sure that your fan is working properly and is correctly seated. This is probably not the cause, but it is something to check before you go and spend more money.

# LETTER OF THE MONTH

AN INCREDIBLE SIDEWINDER GAMEVOICE ONLINE COMMUNICATION PERIPHERAL, COURTESY OF THE NICE PEOPLE AT MICROSOFT. HURRAH FOR THAT!

**Q** I seem to have frequent problems with my computer hanging, and displaying the "Invalid page fault in module kernel32.dll" message. I have an MSI board, Intel Pentium-III 667MHz CPU with 128MB of SDRAM, two Quantum hard disks (8.4GB and 4.3GB respectively), and a Soundblaster Live, a GeForce 256. These errors seem to occur each time I launch my web-browser (Netscape Communicator 4.7), but also during the launching (or running) of a number of other applications and games. Each time it happens, I have to reboot my computer, and needless to say, it's getting extremely frustrating to fix them.

Tony Hawke

**A** Kernet32.dll is a file that runs whenever you load Windows, and is supposed to sit in protected memory. Unfortunately, when another program or application other than Windows attempts to access this area of protected memory (which shouldn't really happen, but does for reasons that are outlined below), an error is caused.

Firstly it is a good idea to point out that it is very rare to have a corrupted kernel32.dll file - it is usually not the source of the problems, only where they first become evident. If it is always the same application that is causing the errors, then chances are that the installation of that program has been corrupted, and generally the easiest way to fix the problem is to uninstall the software and reinstall it again. Another possibility is that your entire Windows installation has become corrupted, and that multiple applications can cause random system lock-ups and crashes - which can usually only be worked around by rebooting your machine. Below is a list of the steps that you will have to take in order to isolate the error in this case (as often times a clean reinstallation will not fix the problems, as the issues causing the errors have not been resolved).

Keep your CPU cool. Something as simple as a dislodged or defective CPU fan can actually cause a wide range of errors as your processor is prone to overheating, which in turn makes the computer extremely unstable. Make sure that the fan is mounted squarely, and that none of the clips that hold the fan on have become dislodged from their housings. A fan or heatsink requires contact with the CPU (and in the case of some CPUs, a layer of thermal grease is recommended between the chip and the fan to improve thermal conductivity). Large CPU fans and heatsinks are not extremely expensive (under $40), and they are well worth the investment to keep a multi-thousand dollar machine running at peak efficiency.

Check your hard disk for errors. From under the Start Menu > Program Files > Accessories > System Tools, run Scandisk.exe to check the hard disk for possible errors.

Restoring the Windows registry to a previous version is actually simpler than most people believe - and it can solve many small problems within Windows (such as those created by faulty installs of software). To restore the registry, go to the command prompt (you can do this by either clicking on the icon under the Start Menu Programs, or by entering "COMMAND.COM" into the "RUN" box under the Start Menu. Once you are at the command prompt, type SCANREG /RESTORE to be presented with a list of possible snapshots of the registry to revert to.

Delete and recreate your swap file. Restart your computer in DOS mode. When at the C:> prompt, type "del C:\windows\win386.swp" Reboot your computer. Windows will automatically create a new swap file for you.

Download an update of kernel32.dll. It is extremely unlikely that your Kernel32.dll file has actually been corrupted, but if you've followed the above steps and are still having a problem, it's worth a visit to the Microsoft web site to download the current version. Although the file hasn't been updated since the release of Windows 98SE, it could still be worthwhile to get the current version from http://downloads.microsoft.com.

Delete your Password List. Although it is quite rare, kernel32.dll errors can sometimes be caused by a corrupted password list. Password lists are kept in the Windows directory, and have the suffix .PWL. The name of the password file will bear close resemblance to your login name. Once you have found the right file, delete it. When you reboot Windows, it will create a new password list.

Upgrade or replace hardware drivers. If, regardless of what you do on a software level, you are still having the same errors, then the error is probably stemming from faulty hardware - either hardware itself or a driver that controls it. It is a good idea to try and hunt down the using a search engine such as Google (http://www.google.com) enables you to enter extremely specific search strings so you can find what you are looking for more quickly and easily. Hardware vendors such as nVidia generally release their driver packs as executables, and they can be quickly and easily downloaded and installed.

# CD POWERPLAY #63

## HARRY'S INTRO

Games require Direct X8 to run properly. Movies will only work if you have the right movie players installed on your PC. The ones you will need to view the movies include Windows Media Player 7.1 , DivX Player and Quicktime 4. In case you don't have them, we've included the latest versions of each file on the CD.

**cdtech@pcpowerplay.com.au**

Faulty CDs will be replaced free of charge. Send it (no postage required), together with a description of the error, to:
**PC PowerPlay CD Returns**
**Reply Paid 634, 78 Renwick St**
**Redfern NSW 2016**

## DEMOS CD 1

### LEADFOOT

Leadfoot is a simulation racing game reproducing the fast paced fun of the sport of stadium off road racing. Pick-up trucks and buggies race around dirt tracks built inside stadiums - Supercross on four wheels.

### ADVENTURE PINBALL

Adventure Pinball is a 3D pinball game with lots of action where you try to save the miniature inhabitants of a volcanic island. It's probably the first pinball to utilise the Unreal Tournament engine.

### DISCS OF TROFF

Discs of TROFF is based on the Disc fighting from the Disney classic "Discs of Tron". You'll square off against Sark in this 3rd person perspective action game currently in development.

### TROPICO

Empire building in the Caribbean. Take control of a small tropical island and build it into whatever you see fit in this strategy game from Pop Top and Gathering of Developers.

### OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Back by popular demand. Operation Flashpoint brings the player the most complex war game experience ever. Experience the best cold war military equipment ñ infantry, mobile, armoured and aircraft first hand.

### MAFIA MOVIE

Take on the role of a hitman, enforcer, getaway driver and more in your struggle for respect, money, and power within the Salieri Family. This full-screen video is in Bink format.

### HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2 MOVIE

You lead a small squad of Allied soldiers deep behind enemy lines, to carry out secret missions during World War II. Here's the special E3 2001 trailer for you to enjoy.

### WARCRAFT III MOVIE

This is a fantasic cinematic trailer to the upcoming RTS sequel to the great Warcraft series, Warcraft III, that was shown at this years E3 convention.

### MAX PAYNE MOVIE

With great character movement, graphics, and John Woo like action packed game play, Max Payne is sure to be a hit. This movie is in Mpeg format.

### BALDUR'S GATE 2: THRONE OF BHAAL MOVIE

Here is the cool movie of the latest PC addition to this fantastic series that was shown at this years E3.

### NEVERWINTER NIGHTS MOVIE

A large and long video of Neverwinter Nights shot at E3 2001. The .wmv movie includes almost a half an hour of video.

### MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT MOVIE

This is very nice video that was shown at this years E3 convention of Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, in high resolution and Quicktime format.

## PATCHES

4x4 Evolution Geforce3 Upgrade
Age of Sail II v1.52 Patch
Battle of Britain Patch v1.02
Close Combat: Battle of the Bulge Patch v4.02 (UK/International)
Deus Ex Patch v1112fm
Diablo II v1.06b Upgrade Patch (Windows)
Hidden & Dangerous v1.3
Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter Patch
Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns Patch v1.0.9 (Retail)
Majesty: The Northern Expansion Patch
Myst Masterpiece Edition: Windows 2000 Patch
No One Lives Forever version 1.003 patch
Red Alert 3.03 Patch
Rune v1.07 Patch
Sacrifice Patch #3
StarCraft Brood War v1.08b Update Patch (Windows)
Summoner v.1.21 Patch
Tribes 2 Update v22460 - v22755
Tropico 1.02 Patch
Warcraft II Battle.net Edition 2.02 PC Patch

Beach Head 2000

### ARCANUM

Imagine a world in which humans, dwarves, orcs and elves coexist, with dozens of cities, dungeons, and towns to explore. Welcome to the adventure of a lifetime in the land of Arcanum. From the smog-enshrouded glow of its modern cities to the murky mines of the dwarves, both enchantment and mechanical marvels will bewitch and bewilder you at every turn.

### STARTOPIA

On a thriving galactic network of starships, space stations and planets, you will lead the way in rebuilding the commerce and communications of the old empire, reuniting the surviving alien peoples under one banner.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE DRUIDS

This is a cool adventure in which you play as Scotland Yard Detective, Brent Halligan. It's up to you to investigate a new death that fits in with a series of killings that have taken place in London recently.

### ECHELON

Echelon is a military aircraft simulation set in the distant future, in 2351. The player assumes the role of a pilot of the Galactic Federation, defending a planet attacked by rebels in possession of secret alien technology.

### MERCHANT PRINCE II

Here is a great turn based strategy demo that takes place in the Renaissance era. A time of discoveries, trade and untold wealth awaits the merchant prince. How far can you go.

### WARM UP!

A high-speed racing game that gives you simulation mixed with arcade style gameplay. With twenty-two cars to choose from, race to beat the lap times in the game, or against other players times collected via the internet.

### SPACE TRIPPER

Space tripper is a truly modern arcade shoot-em-up, combining the manic gameplay of classics such as defender, with a stunning state of the art 3D engine.

### SAFARI BIATHLON

Tear up the track in futuristic turbocars and speed along at cosmic speeds over wonderous landscapes in this great battling race game.


Beach Head


Beach Head


Beach Head


Beach Head


Beach Head

## GAMEPLAY

### GEFORCE TWEAK UTILITY 3.0.3

This is a great utility to tweak your GeForce card to the max. This utility allows you make a lot of modifications to the registry settings of your Geforce videocard.

### TROPICO EDITOR DOCUMENTATION AND UTILITIES

These are the documentation and utilities for the Tropico editor. You only need to grab these if you are interested in using the editor provided with the game.

### QUAKE III TEAM ARENA MAP PACK 2

This id-approved map pack contains the work of four mappers from the online gaming community. Enjoy em as you frag your enemies to kingdom come.

### WORMS WORLD PARTY SOUNDBANK EDITOR

WWP features the ability to create new or modify any of the existing speech banks using standard WAV (wave) sound format. It is also compatible with the hundreds of sound banks available on the Internet

### TRIBES 2 INVENTORY EDITOR V1.0

A clean and cute visually enhanced Tribes2 Favourites editor with some pretty features...
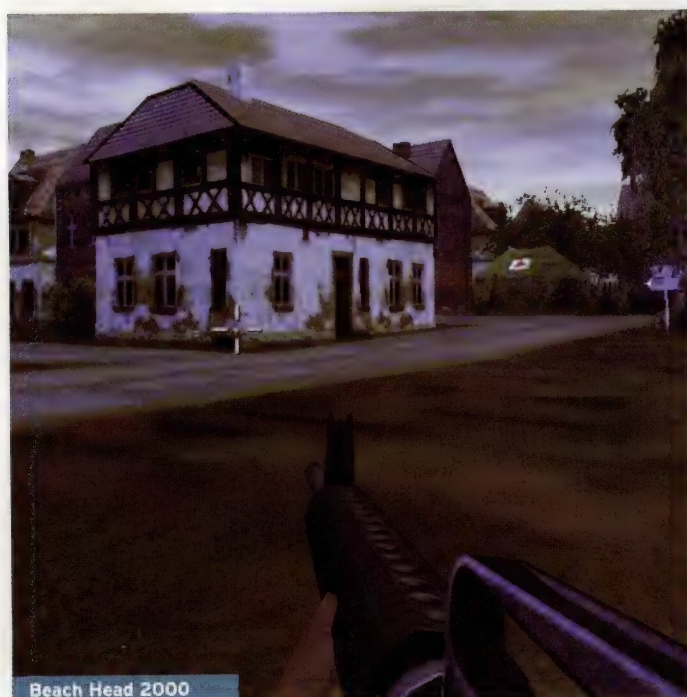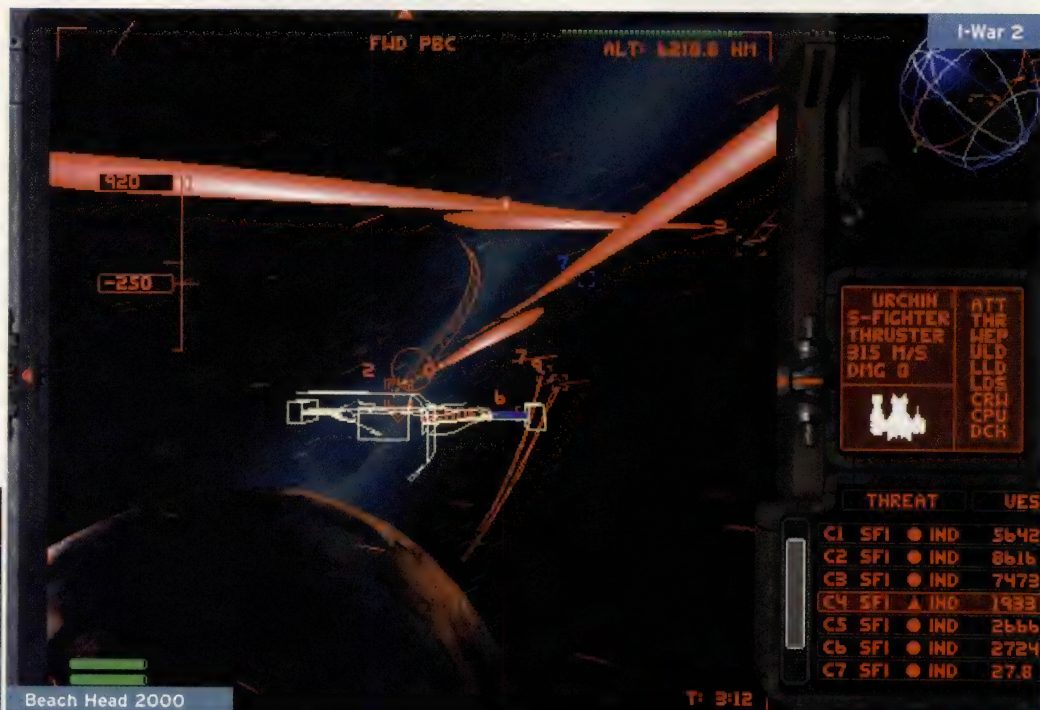

Beach Head 2000

# DVD GUIDE

## FULL GAME

### INDEPENDENCE WAR

Independence War is a space simulation set in the future; featuring advanced 3D graphics, atmospheric audio, and a realistic flight model. Combine these with a strong plot and innovative mission design and you get a title that the PCPP crew once described as the hottest 'Space Simulation of 1998/99'. This month we bring you the FULL version of the game.

Extra Files include Patch v1.24, I-WAR 3D FX Upgrade v1.0 and the installation guide.

Beach Head 2000

## EXTRA DEMOS

Beach Head 2000

### ERACER ONLINE

eRacer is a high octane racing game that can be played as a single or multi-player, Internet-based title. It has been designed using the latest 3D technologies to deliver the ultimate racing experience.

### OFF-ROAD REDNECK RACING

Officially endorsed by Leonard and Bubba, Off-Road Redneck Racing is a blast of seriously fun off-road racing action featuring motor trucks n' buggies over the most brutal Southern terrain ever seen in a racing game.

### ECHELON (ENGLISH VERSION)

Echelon is a military aircraft simulation set in the distant future, in 2351. The player assumes the role of a pilot of the Galactic Federation, defending a planet attacked by rebels in possession of secret alien technology.

### BONUS MOVIES

Red Faction
Torn
PlanetSide

# CONTROLS

## ARCANUM

Movement and controls are all controlled via the mouse.

## ADVENTURE PINBALL

Keyboard
Z X C V B and Left Mouse -- ButtonLeft Flipper
N M , . / and Right Mouse -- ButtonRight Flipper
Down Arrow -- Pull down plunger
A S D F G -- Bump Left
H J K L ; -- Bump Right
Pause -- Pause game
Escape -- Main menu toggle or Previous menu
Spacebar Enter -- Throw ball after cavewoman picks it up (if prompted)
Left/Right Flipper -- Aims cavewoman after picking up ball (if prompted)
F9 -- Screenshot (saved in your Adventure Pinball Demo\System directory)

## LEADFOOT

Controls
left, right - Steer
up - Accelerate
down - Brake
space - Change camera view
left shift - Half lock steering
X - Change gear up
Z - Change gear down

## ECHELON

Flight
Turn Up - Down arrow
Turn Down - Up arrow
Turn Left - W
Turn Right - R
Bank Left - Left arrow
Bank Right - Right arrow
Move Forward - D
Move Backward - Space
Move Left - S
Move Right - F
Move Up - E
Move Down - X
Set Engine Throttle to 0% O (letter)
Decrease Engine Throttle 10% - Minus sign
Increase Engine Throttle 10% - Equal sign
Set Engine Throttle to 100% - Backspace
Fire Weapon - Mouse1
Switch to next weapon group - Tab
Select Next Target - [
Select Previous Target - ]
Select Most Threatening Target - V
Select Nearest Target - T
Select Target at Reticule - G
Select Suggested Target - C


Beach Head 2000

Switch Autopilot On/Off - A
Show Map M

## TROPICO

All controls are via the mouse

## MERCHANT PRINCE

All controls are via the mouse

## MYSTERY OF THE DRUIDS

All controls are via the mouse

## STARTOPIA

Keypad * / - Height
INS or DEL - Height
Plus / Minus - Change Deck
PgUP / PgDN - Change Deck
Home / End - Look
Cursors - Move
Cursors + Shift - Look
Cursors + Control  Move
Mouse at edge of screen - Move

## WARM UP

Left  - Left Arrow
Right - Right Arrow
Up  - Accelerate
Down - Brake
Gear Down - Right Ctrl
Gear Up - Right Shift
Pitstop - Numpad .
Rear View - Num 0

## SPACE TRIPPER



Left  - Left Arrow
Right - Right Arrow
Up  - Up Arrow
Down - Down Arrow
Flip Direction - 2
Fire Primary - C
Change Weapon - X
Pause - Space

## INDEPENDENCE WAR

Arrows - pitch up, pitch down, roll left, roll right
Comma, Fullstop - rudder left, rudder right

Plus - increase throttle
Minus - reduce throttle
A - forward boost
Z - reverse boost
L - engage LDS
Space - fire
Return - select weapons system
F1 - navigation
F2 - engineering
F3 - weapons
F4 - commander
Shift+Q - quit mission

# HALL OF FAME

WELCOME TO PCPOWERPLAY'S HALL OF FAME, YOUR ON-GOING GUIDE TO THE GREATEST GAMES IN THE WORLD. WE'VE NAMED THEM - THE TOP FIVE OF EACH GENRE, REGARDLESS OF RELEASE DATE, REGARDLESS OF WHAT SCORE THEY RECEIVED. THESE ARE THE ENDURING CLASSICS - PLAY THEM RIGHT NOW!

## STRATEGY

**Age of Empires 2: Age of Kings  94% . #42**
Perfectly balanced affair with numerous races on the grand scale.

**Black & White  92% . #60**
Conquer the world with belief by controlling villagers and a giant beast.

**Hostile Water  91% . #61**
Combines FPS action with all kinds of strategy. Deploy and control units from a carrier.

**Homeworld  95% . #41**
Real Time mission-based epic boasts greatest camera and most beautiful 3D space ever.

**Sacrifice  90% . #55**
Magic-based real time combat strategy with one wizard and enormous maps.

## ROLEPLAYING
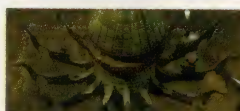
**Planescape: Torment  91% . #46**
Characters and combat used perfectly in a dense, emotive world. The greatest story ever.

**Baldur's Gate II  93% . #53**
Classes, skills, artifacts and extended gameplay in purest Dungeons & Dragons adventure.

**Fallout 2  88% . #32**
Traditional roleplaying amidst frighteningly real post-atomic disaster.
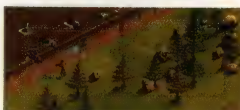
**Jagged Alliance 2  89% . #42**
Strong combat, tactics and extreme detail in this squad-based strategy.

**Everquest  90% . #39**
High fantasy and hi-tech meet in this stunning online extravaganza.

## RACING

**F1 Racing Championship  90% . #60**
The best looking and fastest of its kind. The Ferrari of F1 sims.

**Grand Prix Legends  95% . #30**
The old standard that gave new meaning to historical accuracy - and a real challenge!

**Colin McRae 2  85% . #57**
Superior physics, high realism and lean design. Just the rally essentials.

**GP 500  96% . #43**
Motorcycle Championship game in its own league. Superb racing in its own right.

**Grand Prix 3  88% . #53**
Third instalment of the classic F1 series with amazing AI, weather and authenticity.

## ACTION

**Deus Ex  98% . #51**
The most complete games experience ever: FPS, RPG, whatever you wish.

**Thief (I & II)  95% . #33**
Pioneered stealth as the new way to kill and tension as the new adrenalin.

**System Shock 2  98% . #42**
Genre bending shocker where computers are mad and techno-fear is alive & well.

**Half Life  98% . #31**
New school FPS with awesome weapons, chilling script and great pacing.
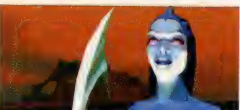
**Giants  86% . #58**
Three species strategy hybrid with the most diverse play styles. Beautiful, stylish and long term.
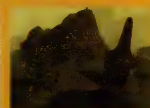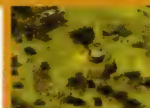
## RECENT GOLD AWARDS

**Summoner** 90% . #61

**F1 Racing Championship** 90% . #60

**Tribes 2** 93% . #60

**Sudden Strike** 92% . #60

**Nascar Racing 4** 93% . #60

**Battle of Britain** 90% . #59

## SPORT

**Tony Hawk 2** 92% . #58
Perfect blend of challenge, control and excitement in this X-large sports classic.

**Links 2001** 82% . #57
The finest example of PC golf on the planet.

**FIFA 2001** 84% . #57
The closest to football reality with a bigger pitch, best defense and nicest special moves.

**NBA Live 2001** 81% . #60
Backboard mayhem in the finest b-ball game to date.

**Madden 2001** 78% . #56
American football with the perfect engine and all prettied up.

## MANAGEMENT

**The Sims** 90% . #47
People simulation phenomenon offers complete domestic control.

**RollerCoaster Tycoon** 93% . #36
Maintain theme parks while building coasters, thrill rides and toilets

**SimCity 3K** 90% . #35
Finest in the classic series, guide your city from settlement to metropolis
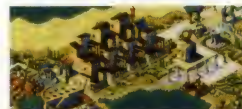
**Zeus** 91% . #58
Reign in terror or glory over your little Greek worshippers

**Championship Manager 00/01** 90% . #57
Authentic soccer mayhem from the sidelines

## FLIGHT SIM

**Mig Alley** 92% . #42
Great mix of strategy, first class planning and a superb flight model.

**I-War** 89% . #21
Deep space sim that made the genre what it is. Superb.

**Falcon 4** 98% . #33
Aerial thrills, high realism, the aging master of flight.

**Freespace 2** 95% . #44
Gorgeous visuals, stunning story, superb space battle action.

**Jane's FA /18** 91% . #37
High class, accessible, realistic top quality flight sim is the business

## ONLINE
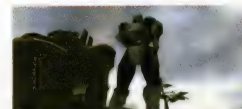
**Tribes 2** 93% . #60
The finest co-operative combat experience in the first person

**Counter Strike** 91% . #55
Half Life and team-based battle are the quintessential online experience

**Quake 3** 93% . #45
Slickest, simplest, most user-friendly deathmatch experience bar none

**Unreal Tournament** 94% . #45
Options and modes of play mean UT offers the goods for online deathmatch variety

**Worms: World Party** 90% . #62
Premiere online puzzle strategy game. Command tiny worms with giant weapons

# DUNE 2



## REASONS TO BE NOSTALGIC

- The genesis of a genre - the first RTS-as-we-know-it on the PC
- Like the novel you could really feel the sand between your fingers
- Excellent use of speech when FM synthesis was the norm
- Sandworms

T he planet Arrakis, known as Doon. Land of sand. Home of the spice, Melange. The Spice controls the Empire. Whoever controls Doon controls the Spice. The Emperor has proposed a challenge to each of the Houses. "The House that produces the most Spice will control Doon. There are no set territories, and no rules of engagement." Vast armies have arrived. Now three Houses fight for

control of Doon! The noble Atreides. The insidious Ordos. And the evil Harkonnen. Only one House will prevail. Your battle for Doon begins... now.

They say Doon and we say June, either way it was the first and to some the greatest RTS on the modern PC. Sure, there were other titles that were a little bit like an RTS, such as David's precious Ancient Art of War, but it was Westwood's Dune 2: The Building of a Dynasty (later re-released as Dune 2: Battle for Arrakis – go figure) that forged the form of RTS that we know, love and buy by the truckful today.

Based on the Frank Herbert novels in much the same way that Mel

Gibson's The Patriot was based on actual real historical events, Dune 2 nevertheless took the core concepts of that greatest of all Sci-Fi empires and melded them into a tight, exciting gameplay package.

For a start, Dune 2 had heaps of speech. The units, the bodiless adviser, who can ever forget those chilling words; "Atreides unit approaching from the South"? Smashing your way through ten missions for each House, with each mission unlocking some new bit of highly destructive technology, until at last you had access to nuclear weapons, saboteurs and Devestator Tanks.

The game had its fair share of

shortcomings; only the Harkonnen guided missile special weapon was worth spending 999 credits on a Palace for, with even our darling Fremen little more than a bunch of rocket infantry who we couldn't control. And the bug (was it a bug?) that meant the CHOAM frigate with your load of ten new missile launchers sometimes didn't turn up, ripping you off thousands of credits.

But all in all Dune 2 was indeed the birth of a Dynasty, cementing Westwood forever in our hearts and allowing us to forgive them for that pile of tripe, Tiberian Sun.

**Anthony Fordham**



## THE ARCHIVE — FIVE YEARS AS AUSTRALIA'S AUTHORITY ON PC GAMING

### PCPP#11    APRIL 1997

And so Diablo was finally released, and what do you know? We quite liked it. March described it as "an addictive game with plenty of atmosphere." Indeed, as soon as the punters read our review, Diablo shot to the top of the best seller charts and there it stayed for months. However, tellingly, March also mentioned that "hacking and slashing can become a little tedious" so it's no surprise that in these enlightened days we're rather less keen on Blizzard's dungeon crawl franchise... at least until we got a hold of Lord of Destruction. Also in PCPP#11 we condescendingly explained how to build your very own PC, and isn't it a delight to look back now to remind ourselves exactly how to install a Maths Coprocessor and a Pentium Overdrive chip. Also in Tech we waxed lyrical about the glorious future of both the Cyrix M2 and AMD K6 processors... which if you recall were left quickly for dead by the Pentium II and Celeron a bare 18 months later. All in all the general tone of PCPP#11 was one of hope... hope that 3D cards would become cheaper so we could actually start to play some of the new games that were coming in.

### REVIEWS
Diablo (91%)
Realms of the Haunting (91%)
Stars! (89%)

> "Why shout about a product when you have incomplete code?"
> Unknown employee of Virtual Studios reminding us of the good old days just before he
> and his company disappeared into the mists of oblivion

PS2

PSX

PC

DREAMCAST

NINTENDO 64

XBOX

GAMECUBE

GAME BOY

# YOUR GUIDE TO 2001 AND BEYOND!

# HYPER »

ALL THE GAMES – ALL THE SYSTEMS

# AGONY AUNT BROKE DOWN

**L**ast month you recall the boots thought it would be a good idea if you all wrote to pcpp_yellowboots@yahoo.com.au with your difficult personal problems and the boots and I would have a stab at solving them or at least get a good laugh. Well the response has been simply overwhelming, with a massive 234 messages received in a bare 28 days. Those of you with Advanced Diplomas in Pure Maths will of course realise that's more than 8 messages a day! Which in turn comes out to one cry for help every three hours. The boots and I hurriedly printed off as many messages as we could before The Girl came home and kicked us off The Computer to play the Sims (see PCPP#62). Then we sat in a sort of huddled ball on the couch weeping mirthfully as we read each tragic tale of woe. Or something. Here, for your eptification are a very select few, those stories we feel best express the eternal human condition.

## GIRL LOVE

Dear Yellow Boots,
I want to make a girl love me but she doesn't love me how do I make her love me because I love her lots.

Casanova

*Dear Casanova, girls are easily impressed by bright shiny objects such as small pieces of tinfoil cut out and sewn into a cap. You might also try showering occasionally.*

## FORTY-TWO

Dear Yellow Boots,
What is the meaning of life?

pHaLaNx

*Dear pHaLaNx, according to PCPP senior writer John Dewhurst, the meaning of life is Choice, but I have no idea what that means.*

## CLAUD BODY

Dear yellow boots,
i am a humourous magazine character who nobody likes even though i am 133+ and they are lame and i have a cat who is a 133+ (@+ while all their cats are lame but still no one likes me and they hack on me in the forums what can i do

dr claw

*Unfortunately dr claw, the mob has spoken, and when the mob speaks we listen, so you are indeed destined for the inglorious chop. And so is your cat.*

## URINARY INFECTION

Dear Yellow Boots,
I am the Editor of a national magazine in a related field and I was looking for some advice on how to deal with disrespectful and unruly staff. They're always late to work and they dress real sloppy and I have grave doubts about their personal hygiene. One of them has also chosen to grow a beard which, for religious reasons, I find very offensive. The other staff member is continually undermining my authority and yesterday I found him urinating into my coffee mug. The real problem is that recent workplace relations legislation makes it unlawful for me to take to either staff member with a horsewhip; I'm only permitted to use a short riding crop which is no deterrent at all. Please please please help me, I'm at the end of my tether.

D
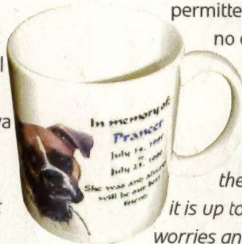
*Dear D - if that really is your name - as an editor you are not governed by the same laws as we mere mortals so it is up to you to transcend these petty worries and attain a state of pure serenity. May I suggest Prozac? Valium is also quite useful, I find, especially in a strong brandy. As for removing urine stains from coffee mugs, I find Big Kev's Shower Blaster to be very effective - after all Kev, like your staff, is EXCITED!*

**Actually maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all. Next month the boots will go back to visiting whacko Australian game developers, that's less painful.**

**pcpp_yellowboots@yahoo.com.au**

## WHY CAN'T YOU BE AS NICE AS DWAYNE?



TOP ELEVATION

OTHER TOP ELEVATION

As constant readers will be aware, PC PowerPlay recently celebrated its fifth birthday in what David Wildgoose likes to call "the business". The boots and I were particularly excited because David had generously allowed us to handle all of the presents we would be receiving from our readers. Well, the official date of the birthday came and went, the mag hit newsstands, the next issue hit newsstands, then the issue after that hit newsstands and we had still not received a single present from any of our readers. Come on guys, surely you've all had a few birthdays by now, you know the drill - we turn five, you give us presents. It's fortunate then that there is at least one loving reader out there. His name is Dwayne Hurst, and he at least took the time and the effort to send us a very nice present which you can see pictured here. Look at the workmanship. Look at how many hours have gone into that. Dwayne put so much effort into this gift that its natural function has been completely subsumed by the sheer amount of love he's poured into it. Dwayne Hurst is a model reader, folks, and you could all learn a lot from him.  Speaking of the Gift's natural function, our first thought was to store all our complaint letters in it, but perhaps you, our darling, loving readers can think of something better. Please, do forward your thoughts and suggestions to pcpp_yellowboots.com.au. And forward your presents to the address in the front of this fine magazine. Bastards.
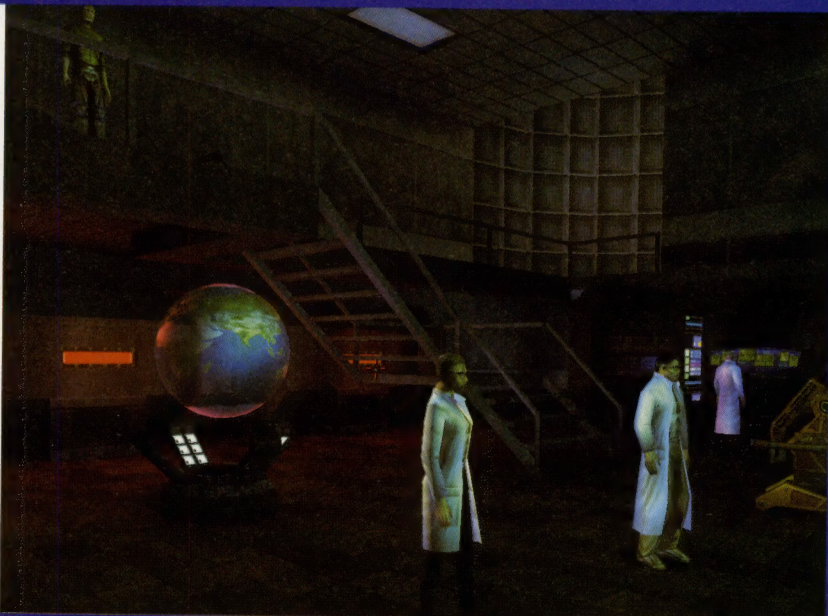
# NEXT MONTH...

## ● THE TOP 100

It's time once more for PCPP's annual countdown of the greatest games ever made. Will Deus Ex hang onto the top position?

## ● REVIEWED!

Arcanum, Operation Flashpoint, Throne of Bhaal, Mech Commander 2, Gangsters 2, and maybe even Max Payne...

**PC POWERPLAY #64 - ON SALE AUGUST 1, 2001**